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“FREE MEN NAME THEMSELVES”: U.S. CAPE VERDEANS & BLACK IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE ERA OF REVOLUTIONS, 1955-75

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Abstract:

Contrary to widely held assumptions about Cape Verdean immigrants in the US – based on oral folklore and early historiography – the population was never “confused” about their collective identity. Individuals and groups of Cape Verdeans wrestled with US racial ideology just as they struggled to make new lives for themselves and their families abroad. The men and women confronted African-American or “black” identity politics from the moment of their arrivals upon these shores, and chose very deliberate strategies for building community, re-inventing their lives and creating pathways for survival and resistance. One exceptional tool for providing others with a window into this complex history is oral history. This article explores the experience of one Cape Verdean activist during what I’m calling the era of revolutions – twenty odd years when the US Civil Rights Movement reached its peak and worldwide Pan-African revolutions took place in countries throughout the African Diaspora including Cape Verde. Through the oral history of Salah Matteos, readers will (1) better understand modern Cape Verdean American history, in other words, the world that many Cape Verdean Americans navigated during these critical years; (2) the reactions to and roles of Cape Verdean Americans in the US Civil Rights and Black Power/Black Arts struggles; (3) the reactions to and roles of US-based Cape Verdeans in the Cabral-led war for Cape Verdean/Guinean independence; and (4) the contributions of Amilcar Cabral to the evolution of “black” politics and African-American identity.

Key Words:

Cape Verdean Americans, migration, Onset, Wareham, Civil Rights Movement, assimilation, Cape Verdean nationality, Capeverdeanness, Jim Crow, blackness or black identity, African Diaspora, immigration, race and US racial ideology, “one drop rule,” black New England, ethnicity, multicultural, identity politics, WEB DuBois, Nelson Mandela, Amiri Baraka, Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, Amilcar Cabral.

"... Amilcar et present dans les mémoires. Lorsque Lucette Cabral, ta belle-soeur, bien des années plus tard, a dit à Nelson Mandela, en matière d'hommage, au lendemain de l'apartheid:

– You are the best. Ce dernier a simplement répondu: – No, there is Cabral.

Gérard Chaliand, *La Pointe Du Couteau; Un apprentissage du monde*

"The evolution of the word negro from colored, to black, to African represents a progression of self-awareness. As a free people, we have a responsibility to educate ourselves and rediscover our Identities. Knowledge of self is the key to unlocking the door to the future."

Richard B. Moore, *The Name "Negro": It's Origin & Evil Use*

"Black males who refuse categorization are rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether by embodying it or seeking to be other than it... Negative stereotypes about the nature of black masculinity continue to over-determine the identities black males are allowed to fashion for themselves."

bell hooks, *We Real Cool*

Contrary to widely held assumptions about Cape Verdean immigrants in the US – based on oral folklore and early historiography – the population was never "confused" about their collective identity. Individuals and groups of Cape Verdeans wrestled with US racial ideology just as they struggled to make new lives for themselves and their families abroad. The men and women confronted African-American or "black" identity politics from the moment of their arrivals upon these shores, and chose very deliberate strategies for building community, re-inventing their lives and creating pathways for survival and resistance. There is no better tool for providing others with a window into this complex history than oral history, firsthand accounts of Cape Verdeans themselves whose lived experiences give voice to the dilemmas faced when and if "blackness" was assumed or negotiated. This article explores the experience of one Cape Verdean activist during what I'm calling the era of revolutions – twenty odd years when the US Civil Rights Movement reached its peak and Pan-African revolutions took place in countries throughout the African continent and its Diaspora including Cape Verde. Through this account of the experiences of Salah Matteos, readers will (1) better understand modern Cape Verdean American history, in other words, the world that many Cape Verdean Americans navigated during these critical years; (2) the reactions to and roles of Cape Verdean Americans in the US

Civil Rights and Black Power/Black Arts struggles; (3) the reactions to and roles of US-based Cape Verdeans in the Cabral-led war for Cape Verdean/Guinean independence; and (4) the contributions of Amílcar Cabral to the evolution of "black" politics and African-American identity.

This essay is grounded in three areas of study – African Diaspora studies, African-American history and Cape Verdean studies. By attempting to borrow and blend theory and markers from each, it makes significant interventions and contributions to all three. For instance, within the context of African Diaspora studies, the population of Cape Verdeans in the US (or elsewhere) is considered but not always given the attention it deserves – rather, more often, Cape Verde and its diaspora are examined strictly as part of the Lusophone world or as a unique case altogether. Second, in the field of African-American history, works that look at "black" immigrants have rarely, fully explored the Cape Verdean case; Cape Verdean immigration is often considered within the fields of immigration or ethnicity studies, not necessarily through the lens of critical (race) theory, cultural studies or critiques of racial essentialism. Finally, within the field of Cape Verdean studies, arguably, there is a lag with regards to historical considerations of Cape Verde and Cape Verdeans' importance to US history (beyond the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and whaling, cranberries, etc.) and Cabral's importance to US African-American racial ideology is – as yet – largely unexplored.¹

What was the meaning of Cape Verde and *Caboverdianidade* to US born Cape Verdeans during this time period? What was the meaning of blackness for immigrants of African descent? What has it meant/ does it mean to be "black" in an immigrant, particularly Cape Verdean body (if one is phenotypically characterized as "black" or even if not)? And what did it mean to be "black" and Cape Verdean during a critical historical moment in the evolution of black consciousness and the simultaneous transformation of the Cape Verdean state and nationality, 1955-1975. All of this occurring against the backdrop of international revolutions; here I am most concerned with

1. Here I am referring to the following examples within African Diaspora studies: Davies, Mazrui & Okpewho (1999), Hine & McLeod (2000), the *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora* (2008) edited by Carole Boyce Davies, and works such as *The New African Diaspora* (2009) edited by Isidore Okpewho & Nkiru Nzegwu. Within Cape Verdean Studies, there is the forthcoming work of Carla Martin (Anthropology, Linguistics and African-American Studies) and Terza Lima-Neves (Political Science) which will help to change this and make significant contributions to our expanding understanding of the phenomenon of diaspora within the Cape Verdean world. Few monographs within African-American history/studies have included or explored Cape Verdeans. Three studies of "black" immigrants that are often consulted are: *Caribbean New York* (1992) by Philip Kasinitz, *The Other African-Americans* (2007) by editors Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch, and *Black Identities* (2009) by Mary Waters.

those related principally to the Pan-African liberation movement (of course, there are complex linkages between most if not all). These are among the questions explored here. In addition, the role of gender in the construction of revolutionary identity – in specific, (black) masculinity and perhaps Cape Verdean gender politics – is considered.

The oral history of Salah Matteos demonstrates how Cape Verdean identity (nationality) was born out of the fire of revolutions on all sides of the Atlantic during the nearly forty years between *Claridade* and independence (and for Matteos, during the twenty years in focus here – 1955 to 1975). Matteos's testimony invites us to explore many themes at the heart of Cape Verdean studies, namely multiple subjectivities or identity and hybridity, the immigrant relationship to homeland, cross-generational/cross-cultural ties, and other tropes. Perhaps most importantly, his account begs further exploration of Amílcar Cabral's impact upon the US Civil Rights struggle and Black Liberation Movements worldwide. During the period explored in this piece, it is curious to consider Cabral's impact, upon an emerging sense of "Blackness" in the US, rooted in black power ideologies grounded in the internationalism of the era. Cabralism (a term coined by Cabral biographer/filmmaker Valerio Lopes) served as a powerful catalyst in these movements.² As the above epitaph by Gérard Chaliand says, Mandela suggested Cabral was 'the best' in the pantheon of revolutionary Pan-Africanists. Arguably, Cabralist thinking liberated the liberators, and ultimately freed the then Portuguese colonials living in the US to name themselves "Cape Verdeans" or any other names they would choose in Civil Rights era America.

As many scholars of *The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. DuBois have summarized, the classic monograph brings to life the theme of race as individual and collective journey – revealing the political color line and the personal one. Take, for instance, the following passage from the 1903 book:

To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark, the mists were often cold, the Canaan was always dim and far away. If, however, the vistas disclosed as yet no goal, no resting-place, little but flattery and criticism, the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation

2. *Cabralista*, Part I, Documentary by Director Valerio Lopes (2011). Lopes wrote, produced and directed this first in what will be a trilogy documentary-biography on Amílcar Cabral. In the film, he asserts that Africans (and supportive others) should promote the ideologies of Cabral as "Cabralists" and students of "Cabralism" and in this way, in naming, they will promote the process of recognizing and giving power to African heroes and ideas rather than consistently reifying Western thinkers and philosophies as somehow superior. I document the experiences of Salah Matteos – himself a Cabralist – as a Cabralist historian engaging in this very process.

to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another.³

DuBois powerfully calls our attention to the importance of the journey itself – not the destination – illustrating the value in self-exploration and soulful awakening. His words can also be linked to bell hooks' assertion that negative misconceptions of blackness "overdetermine" black (male) identities (and arguably all so-called black identities in the US). Ultimately, in order for one to escape that trap, one "must be himself," as DuBois harkens, "and not another." Cape Verdeans in twentieth century US understood that.

Salah Matteos is a second generation Cape Verdean American activist/Cabralist, who was one of a limited number of American-born activists to go to Cape Verde or Guinea Bissau during the war for independence. Matteos traveled to Guinea Bissau in an attempt to fight in the Cabral-led armed struggle. His story begins with his roots in the south shore of Massachusetts. The life history provides a narrative about one man's search for self, and attempt to reconcile various aspects of his sociopolitical identity. Those final phrases of the DuBois passage above could be taken as metaphor for the era of revolutions that set the stage for Salah Matteos's story. Herein, we witness the collective striving of nations being born. In Luso-Africa, a Cabral-led army of revolutionaries united some thirty tribes in Guinea and people across the ten islands of Cape Verde to overcome the Portuguese. In the process, individual sons and daughters of Cape Verde in the US (and elsewhere) began to find their places in the world and to assert themselves politically and culturally. However, in order to fully understand the "place" and evolution of Matteos and other Cape Verdeans, it is necessary to rehearse a bit of the history of the archipelago in relation to the US New England region where our story takes place, and the wider global context within which the story unfolds.

The New England Cape Verdean Context

The first significant groups of Cape Verdean immigrants came to the United States in the period immediately after Reconstruction, at the height

3. DuBois, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk*, Edited with an Introduction by David W. Blight & Robert Gooding-Williams. Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997.

of the mid 19th century (1850s). These years have been characterized as some of the lowest and darkest within US African-American history due to the “Jim Crow” system of sharecropping and racial segregation, widespread racial terrorism (in the form of lynching), and laws that disfranchised and oppressed black people at every turn. Racial politics aside, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that relationships between Cape Verdeans and North Americans began way before the first immigrants landed on New England (mainly Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island) shores. The interactions started during the final years of the 17th century and 18th century slave trade when wealthy New Englanders participated in and benefited from human trafficking. We know that the archipelago was a crucial point used during the trade that essentially allowed for the birth of the modern world based on the slave economy. Interactions between North Americans and Cape Verdeans continued in the seas, long after the slave trade, when Nantucket whalers traveled there in the 1750s for exploratory maritime journeys, often negotiating with skilled Cape Verdean fishermen and eventually bringing them aboard. The fact that these interactions started on the Atlantic seas and in transition between the islands themselves and US ports is an appropriate symbol for how fluid Cape Verdeans’ interactions with New Englanders were and how flexible their collective (and individual) places – and identities – have been within American society.

Those pioneering Cape Verdean immigrants came in low numbers relative to the population of the islands and compared with other immigrants from the African Diaspora (namely various Caribbean migrants, such as Jamaicans or Barbadians) who arrived during the same period. According to the Cape Verdean historian António Carreira, the first voluntary emigrations from Cape Verde were in small groups of all men. In 1890, the Cape Verdean population was numbered at 130,000. It reached 147,000 by the turn of the twentieth century. Between 1891 and 1900, there were just 2,340 Cape Verdean immigrants that came into the US (concentrated in New England states), 8.5% of all immigrants of Portuguese origin. The immigrants traveled in groups of about 140–398 per year.⁴ The total black or “colored” population in New England states in 1900 was also limited. This was due to the fact that ninety percent of blacks lived in the US south at this time. There were 35,582 blacks in Massachusetts at the turn of the century and less than 10,000 blacks in the state of Rhode Island. Due to ambiguities in the federal census, and especially in records of Cape Verdeans at the time, it is difficult to estimate what percentage of the black population was Cape Verdean – if

4. Immigration Statistics from: António Carreira, *The People of the Cape Verde Islands: Exploitation and Emigration*, Marilyn Halter, *Between Race and Ethnicity*

the immigrants were considered/included in the black population count at all.⁵ For instance, of the total black population of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Caribbean immigrants were only counted for Massachusetts, estimated to be a little over 1,000 out of 35,582 people – a minimal percentage of the whole overall. This points to a need for scholars to reconsider the importance of ethnicity in the archival record, with regards to how we use specificity in our historical data, and how to assess the “meaning of blackness” across space and time, for these and similar multiracial/ multinational communities.

Compared with the many groups of immigrants to enter the US from European countries, Cape Verdeans had little representation up until the time where this paper is concerned (1950s). However, the group did make an important impact on the history of the state. Again, a comparative note is offered relating the population of immigrants from Cape Verde with those from Caribbean islands. Nearly 15,000 immigrants came to Massachusetts from countries such as Barbados, Jamaica and Antigua throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Consider the numbers for two census years; there were 2,877 West Indians in Boston alone in 1920 and that number grew to 5,000 by 1950⁶. In 1920, blacks made up only 5% of the state’s total population (4 million); there were 16,350 blacks in the city of Boston alone – a third were of Caribbean descent. By comparison, we would only able to count any significant numbers of Cape Verdeans if we include the entire region. There were nearly 9,000 Cape Verdean immigrants that came into the region, between 1891 and 1910. The numbers of Cape Verdeans in various individual cities and towns were in the hundreds; most were concentrated in New Bedford, Providence and the Cape Cod area at this time. Nevertheless, the immigrants from the African Diaspora made their presence felt through contributions to the cultural diversity of New England states, as workers in the New England labor market, for example in construction of state highways, bridges and railroads, through work as domestics, and as day laborers in the states’ agricultural industry (particularly cranberry and strawberry harvesting) among other things.

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5. For example, according to Richard Lobban, author of *Cape Verde: Crioulo Colony to Independent Nation* (Westview Press, 1995), “[i]rregular recordkeeping, clandestine departures and arrivals, and extensive return migration” are all factors that have contributed to difficulty enumerating the Cape Verdean population; I would add to that phenotypic diversity that would have led to various and inconsistent categorizations among immigration and census recordings historically. In addition, until the independence of (newly named) Cape Verde in 1975, its people were citizens of Portugal and often listed as, and/or self-identified as such.
 6. Violet Mary-Ann Johnson, *The Migration Experience: Social and Economic Adjustment of British West Indian Immigrants in Boston, 1915-1950*, Ph.D. Dissertation. December 1992, Boston College – Department of History

Most of the early Cape Verdean immigrants were men as discussed previously. They entered the New England maritime economy when they boarded Nantucket and New Bedford ships to work on the sea in whaling and other types of fishing. They fled famines that were plaguing Cape Verde intermittently throughout those years and for over half of the twentieth century; they also fled the fascist Portuguese colonial conditions which had left the islands impoverished and the people oppressed and resource-poor. The gender ratio among the earliest migrants clearly suggests the implications of gender and the ways that women's opportunities for mobility and access, in the processes of immigration and formation of diaspora, were very limited. In addition, as we examine gender relations within migrant communities, we can better understand individual and family histories and thus cultural dynamics in diaspora as well.⁷ When these mostly male pioneers settled down and became accustomed to the new homeland, they sent for their wives and sometimes their children as well. Turn of the century (1900) census records provide insight into these patterns. For instance, one family documented as living in Harwich, Massachusetts (a small town on Cape Cod with a long history of a presence of Cape Verdeans) had different years of arrival into the country/state in accordance with the general trend. The head of household, father Lewis Noons (Nunes) arrived in 1874 and his wife Mary arrived in 1892. His six children were all born in Massachusetts after the time when he and his wife were reunited. The family's census entries reinforce the aforementioned ambiguities in records of Cape Verdeans. All are listed as "Black" – Lewis as Black Male, Mary as Black Female – and their birthplaces are listed as Portugal and/or Brava.⁸

With such apparent discrepancies and the differences in recorded birthplaces, and racial classifications, many of the early migrants may have gone unnoticed by scholars not interested in Lusophone immigrants, and certainly may have been left out of secondary sources about African Americans based on these kinds of scant records. The nearly twenty-year lapse between when Mr. Nunes arrived in the US, and when his wife arrived, also indicates complexities in the task of documenting the experiences and cultural histories of those in the Cape Verdean Diaspora. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf discusses these matters and the psychological and emotional aspects of diasporicity in her article "Rethinking diasporicity: embodiment, emotion, and the displaced

7. Questions of gender politics have been researched and documented by scholars within Cape Verdean studies such as Deirdre Meintel, Terza Lima-Neves, Kesha Fikes, Carla Martin and Stephanie Urdang.

8. Pilgrim, Aminah. "Free Men Name Themselves: Cape Verdeans in Massachusetts Negotiate Race, 1900-1980" Dissertation, Rutgers University, 2008.

origin." She states, "diasporicity is at work in every gesture and movement of diasporic being... it concerns the lived experience of embodied beings and bodily practices which have been (actual or by association) 'rooted' in a place, and which by being uprooted and re-routed to another place produce a sort of dis-positioning and re-positioning."⁹

The Nunes family, like the family of Salah Matteos, faced the difficulty of negotiating the pain of having been uprooted, separated from loved ones and/or reunited, and as is discussed in Matteos's testimony, separated again (young Salah from his parents during his childhood) within the host-land due to economic pressures and other life dilemmas. These patterns give us insight into the complexities of the Cape Verdean American experience. These and other oral histories similarly shed light on the phenomenon of diaspora as process and the aspect of the Cape Verdean Diaspora, which I have described elsewhere, being made up "overlapping diasporas" (a term coined by Earl Lewis), having multiple points of origin and settlement, and consistently moving communities, with multiple identities and subjectivities that themselves shift according to time and place.¹⁰ This point will be significant for understanding Salah Matteos's movements later on.

In the first half of the twentieth century, most Cape Verdean migrants came from either Fogo or Brava (with few exceptions) and, as is typical of many immigrant groups, settled in enclave communities that were within yet apart from whites or any other groups. Therein they found obvious support and security while negotiating the barriers created by language and cultural differences. Nevertheless, they faced extreme poverty, exclusion on the basis of race and foreign origin, as well as all other difficulties that emerge in immigration processes.¹¹ The places where Cape Verdeans created these isolated settlements spanned the Northeast region, from Massachusetts to New York, including the following cities in Massachusetts: Nantucket, Wareham and Onset, Carver, Falmouth, Harwich, New Bedford and Boston, Providence, RI, Norwich and Hartford, Connecticut, and Brooklyn, New York. Salah Matteos's family was a part of the isolated, rural milieu of Cape Cod and environs. He mentions being raised between the Cape Verdean villages of Wareham, MA and Marion/ Mattapoisett, MA (small, neighboring towns), before he moved to Roxbury, MA (part of Malcolm

9. Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. "Rethinking diasporicity: embodiment, emotion, and the displaced origin," *Africana and Black Diaspora* 1 (July 2008).

10. Lewis, Earl. "To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African-Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas." *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 765-787; Butler, Kim. "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," *Diaspora* 10:2 (2001). See also Pilgrim dissertation.

11. António Carreira, *The People of the Cape Verde Islands: Exploitation and Emigration* (Lisbon: Libra Press, 1977), 47-48.

X's "black" and West Indian 1940's Boston). He states emphatically "I grew up in Kriolu-ville. And my first language was Kriolu." He continues, describing the importance elders placed upon maintaining language and traditions (such as giving younger ones blessings/ *benson*) and keeping the collective memory of the islands alive through storytelling.¹² This illustrates the importance of place in relation to identity and diasporic subjectivity.¹³ The larger story of Cape Verdean immigration, and the internal US migrations of individuals like Salah illustrate the "overlapping" aspect of this Diaspora, and point to the significance of the theme at the beginning of this paper, that of the personal and collective journey and the overall theme of the meaning of blackness and the agency expressed by those who defined themselves on their own terms.

If we take for granted that movement affects identity, and we consider the ontological condition of blackness (Bakare-Yusuf 148), the fact of Cape Verdeans' *voluntary* immigration (a term with weighted implications given the conditions which forced movement) and their knowing their homeland, complicates their multiple subjectivities in very interesting ways. Going back home was always a pressing matter for immigrants from Cape Verde, known to many as the first, voluntary migrants to the US from Africa. This is a point that cannot be understated in discussing the significance of black identity, for it raises questions around the known and unknown homeland – and the identity/race/socio-cultural place that is ascribed versus chosen (or imagined) on one's own.¹⁴ Many of the initial *Kriolu* migrants kept the idea of returning home in the front of their minds; an indication of how fixed in their minds their home identity was. This was expressed in myriad ways, nearly all traditions that could be preserved were maintained, *inkumendas* (money or gifts sent home, similar to "care packages") were always sent, and the celebrated traditional music genres, particularly *morna*, were played and sung frequently.¹⁵ Elder residents from Onset and Wareham recalled that their indescribable connection to home and the longing their parents or grandparents had for loved ones (*sodadi*) was expressed in the often-sung "Morna de Despidida" (Morna of Farewell):

12. Salah Matteos Oral History, Fairhaven, MA (2011)

13. On the themes of emotion, origin, and freedom, see Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi (2008)

14. Here I am thinking of essays in *Imagining Home* (Verso, 1994) edited by Sidney Lemelle and Robin D. G. Kelley. This question of "home" – imaginary or real – has powerful implications in debates over identity. For instance, in today's social media and in everyday life, we still witness hotly contested discussions over the tensions between those who cannot identify home and ethnic or tribal origin and thus call themselves "just black" and those that readily identify (US-born or not) as

15. "Morna" from English word "mourning"

Hora de bai (Time of departure)
 Hora de dor (Time of pain)
 DJa-n kre (Would that it/ I already wish or want)
 Pa el ka manche (For it to never dawn)
 De cada bez (For every time)
 Ki-m ta lembra (That I remember it)
 Ma'n kre (I want to)
 Fica y morré (Stay/ Lay Down and die)
 Hora de bai
 Hora de dor
 Amor, Dixá-m txora (My love, let me cry)
 Korpu kaptivu (Captive body)
 Bai bo ki é escrabu (Go though, slave)
 'O almu bibu (The Living soul)
 Ken ki lebabu... (Who dares carry you away?)
 Si bem é doce, (If coming home is sweet)
 Bai é maguadu (Leaving is bitter)
 Mas, si ka badu, (Yet, if one doesn't leave)
 Ka ta biradu (One will never return)

The song is still recounted or sung by third or fourth generation Cape Verdeans, an indication of its importance. In a sense, for the so-called "black" immigrant – and it is critical to note, for the immigrant of an emerging nation not yet independent in this era of revolutions – not only is movement of home a certainty but movement of identity as well; indeed it is one source of relief from the pain of separation. In this way, Cape Verdeans frequently manipulated their conditions according to the use of identity politics – often through the choice of language spoken, political or religious affiliations, etc. – and thus, their "blackness" or status as African-Americans is/was never fixed. This was the case for those from Cape Verde and arguably for many other immigrants from the African Diaspora in the US racial context, in spite of the fact that they faced institutionalized racism that sought to categorize and define them otherwise. The descendants of African slaves in the US – according to the "one drop rule" all those of any traceable African descent or the traditionally defined "African-Americans" – always sought alternatives to one definition of blackness and collectively resisted that definition, and its attendant stereotypes, in transforming their collective 'name' (as Richard B. Moore described). "Neo-African-Americans," or "African non-Americans," as filmmaker Kobina Aidoo calls newer black immigrants and their descendants (such as Cape Verdeans, Haitians, Nigerians, etc.), maintain their

cultural identities and resist over-determinant blackness by similarly naming themselves – holding on to the names associated with their countries of origin. Salah Matteos describes this process the following way:

I think that to use color as an identity is to play into the hands of the racist by this color code system. We are an African people and we come from many different countries with names such likes of Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Cape Verde, Morocco, Guinea, Tunisia, etc. Black is not the name of any of the countries. We are to be known by the name of the nation we are from. Not by the color.¹⁶

Era of Revolutions: (On one side of the Atlantic, Civil Rights Movement/ Anti-colonial war versus the Portuguese on other side)

1955-1975 represents a critical moment for examining the meaning of blackness in world history. Salah Matteos came of age and solidified his status as one of the leading Cape Verdean American activists in the US during this time.

He describes his own revolutionary evolution: "It took a number of years... and then when I came out of the Korean war, they killed Emmett Till. That is what spurred me on, was what they did to him... was gruesome... I was so angry, I was ready to go down south and go to war myself!" The lynching of Till is largely understood as the match that lit the fire that became the 1950's and 1960's Civil Rights Movement. Matteos continues, describing going to an African-American barbershop where he met an African-American who he previously knew who had joined the Nation of Islam and changed his name. "I was invited to go a meeting... I was in my 20's. When I heard Malcolm, I was the first one to jump up and was ready to join right then and there." Matteos subsequently did join the Nation of Islam and eventually changed his own name (from birth name Milton Matthews to Salahuddin or Salah Matteos). He speaks about this, and the issue of naming and its significance for socio-political identity. He says:

People were trying to change their names because they felt the names meant something... They would say "Oh...Milton...that's a slave name." "I worked very hard... I rose in the ranks very quickly." When I went to New York and Philadelphia was where I really got entrenched in the black power movement... Stokely

16. Salah Matteos Interview with Viriato Gonçalves, November 18, 2002.

Carmichael and they were talking about black power as opposed to white... And that is when I changed my name to Salahuddin (who, in history, had been a warrior)... But I didn't want to take an African last name, because I knew that I had to deal with the Cape Verdeans and I wanted to keep the 'flavor' of the name but because we were fighting against Portugal, I didn't want to be written like Portuguese or have the Portuguese sound.¹⁷

Here again, the connection between liberation and naming is evident. Matteos's narrative brilliantly captures the complex moves – social, cultural, political, physical and psychological – that a "black" Cape Verdean immigrant (*mestizade/mulato* by the very nature of the Portuguese colonized, African slave history of the archipelago) had to make at this moment. As the very meaning of blackness was being developed and pronounced to the 20th century world, Cape Verdeans such as Salah were coming to terms with the meanings of "African," *Caboverdianidade* and blackness as well. Matteos mentions Stokely Carmichael's declarations about black power – ideas informed by the work of Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral – which, as we now know, transformed blacks' consciousness within the US and had serious implications the globe over.

Upon the 1950's world stage, so many crucial turning points were occurring that would give birth to the world we inherited today. They represent the world in which Salah Matteos came of age. A brief listing reveals this: the Cold War, the Cuban revolution, the Korean War, the ongoing fight for Puerto Rican independence, resistance to apartheid South Africa, and the backdrop of the Vietnam crisis. Also in the US context, McCarthyism was still evident, and the US Civil Rights struggle intensified from which various leaders emerged, such as the likes of Fannie Lou Hamer, Harry Belafonte, Ella Baker, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to name a few. There was Middle East conflict. And Africa was witnessing revolutionary fire on all corners. Libya gained its independence in 1951, Egypt became a republic 1953, the Algerian war for independence began in 1954 (lasting until 1962), and in 1956 Morocco claimed its independence. The same year, Cabral established PAIGC and helped launch MPLA. The Portuguese colonial war would last from 1963 until independence in 1975, surpassing the assassination of Cabral in 1973. These were critical years in the evolution of the Cape Verdean Diaspora in the US and abroad.

To trace the history of Cape Verdean identity in the US, it is interesting to simply rehearse the various names that were imposed upon the immigrants. In the

17. Salah Matteos Interview with Aminah Pilgrim (2011)

early waves of emigration, Cape Verdeans were designated as “Portuguese” and “Black Portuguese”, “Gees,” “Black Male(s)” or “Black Female(s),” maybe born in Portugal, or even “Portuguese Negro.” They were listed as white, black or mulatto, or given an identity based on the island of most frequent origin in the early period such as all of those who were called “Bravas.” Through it all, Cape Verdeans either identified themselves as Portuguese (while under the Portuguese flag – and even here with many exceptions) or Cape Verdean. Indeed, with the Cape Verdean intellectual renaissance known as *claridade*, cultural movements around the *kriolu* language, and eventually the successful fight for independence, gradually a newfound sense of national identity as “Cape Verdean” was solidified.

As one of the founders of the PAIGC Support Committee in the US (a mandate from Cabral to mobilize support for the independence fight), Salah Matteos (with the late Ray Almeida) made a significant contribution to this sense of national identity among Cape Verdeans in North America. This sense of nationalist pride was transported all over the Cape Verdean Diaspora (as reflected in popular culture) helping others to ascertain who and what this unique US immigrant group was. Similarly, Cold War era political movements within the wider African Diaspora took hold in Cape Verde and the archipelago’s intellectuals, literary figures and budding revolutionaries were heavily influenced by what they learned. For instance, Richard Lobban has said: “Given the extent and power of these global movements, it was inevitable that the famous ‘winds of change’ would finally buffet the Cape Verde Islands. For those of African origin and self-identity, these movements were telescoped with the rise of the great spokesmen of nationalism, socialism, and pan-Africanism such as George Padmore, W.E.B. DuBois, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Leopold S. Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, C.L.R. James and Nelson Mandela.”¹⁸

In the context of studying Cape Verde and Cape Verdeans in the US as part of the African Diaspora, it is of great importance to consider that Cape Verdean intellectuals and activists were affected and influenced by so many of these well known figures from the US, the Caribbean and various African nations – all of whom have been studied and recognized for their contributions to the Diaspora and to our contemporary understandings of race, nation, colonialism and cultural resistance. Yet the work of Cabral and his contribution to revolutionary black consciousness – and to the sense of black identity that emerged from the BLM in this era – begs greater attention from scholars. Cabralism had a profound effect on major figures in the

18. Richard Lobban, Jr., *Cape Verde: Crioulo Colony to Independent Nation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 85.

BLM of this period – Amiri Baraka (who helped organize Cabral’s visits to the states), Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael to name the biggest three – which speaks to the importance of his work to the meaning of blackness and blacks freeing themselves within the US. That said, an exploration of Cape Verdeans in the US, as compared with Jamaican, Bajan or Trinidadian (various Caribbean) immigrants, with respect to race, nation, general identity politics and strategies of cultural adaptation or resistance should be pushed further in order to expand the discussion of these issues by presenting a little known chapter in the wider story of black America.

The Cape Verde Islands were liberated (together with Guinea-Bissau) from the Portuguese in 1975 after the successful military revolution led by Amílcar Cabral. Cabral founded the PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cape Verde) in 1956 – which waged the more than twenty-year fight for independence. Cabral is the most well known figure to emerge from Cape Verdean politics and intellectual life. He offered an argument about culture as a determinant of history that is useful for consideration of the cultural history of New England and its African Diaspora residents. An agronomist, he metaphorically described the process of culture shaping history as being similar to the biological processes of planting and flowering. He said: “Just as happens with the flower in a plant, in culture there lies the capacity (or the responsibility) for forming and fertilizing the seedling which will assure the continuity of history, at the same time assuring the prospects for evolution and progress of the society in question.”¹⁹ The culture of Cape Verdeans in the US armed them with certain seeds for resistance and continuation of legacies from the archipelago. The social and cultural history of the African Diaspora is incomplete without broadening the narrative to include those underrepresented groups of people of African descent – particularly those, like Cape Verdeans – that defy our familiar categories.

In terms of understanding black communities in the US, and specifically African Diaspora cultures of New England, and what Matthew Guterl calls the “different notion of racial difference” that emerged in Northeast, this story is of great significance. Thus this is an attempt to analyze the cultures and experiences of the African Diaspora immigrants, who in essence, planted themselves in New England soil, and put down roots – all the while shaping the racial and political landscape of these small states and arguably the nation overall. These immigrants interacted with various groups of native New Englanders, the various ethnic groups, immigrants and other classes

19. Amílcar Lopes Cabral, “National Liberation and Culture,” Speech Delivered for the Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture Series, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. February 20, 1970. The speech was translated from the French by Maureen Webster.

present, and all of these cases reveal interesting insights into the diverse understandings of identity, race, and sociopolitical movements during the twentieth century. In fact, to paraphrase Cabral's words, the culture of race relations of New England is at once the fruit of its long history of a rich African Diaspora presence (adding to the American Indian and European immigrant presences) and the factor that continues to shape its present and its future.

War Internal: The Journey(s) for Personal and Collective Place/Identity

Matteos articulates the significance of the journey and process of finding one's place and identity, and the internal war (and compromises) that this provokes. In one interview, he discussed his activist role(s) in the 1960's around the time of Malcolm X's assassination – an event that devastated him (as it did most of the black revolutionary world and blacks generally). Matteos interacted with Malcolm X on occasion, as a driver and staff person and credits Malcolm with introducing him to the writings of Amilcar Cabral, an event that changes the trajectory of his life and profoundly shaped his identity politics. He states: "I was very much involved in the Black Power struggle. No one knew that I was a Cape Verdean. The rest is history."²⁰ This is certainly not to suggest that he attempted to deny his Cape Verdean heritage or was somehow disconnected from it. In other testimony, he reflected on how much of his childhood upbringing, in the close-knit Cape Verdean pockets near Cape Cod, shaped his worldview and at the same time gave him different sensibilities. He talks at length:

Born in New Bedford but raised in the towns of Wareham and Marion up until the age of about, I think it was 10 or 11 years old, I went to live in Boston... And I went to the military but first I went to Little Everett School House in Wareham (a little red school house)... For the most part, it was mostly Cape Verdeans because it was... we used to talk Kriolu on the playgrounds (especially when we wanted to talk bad about the teachers)... names... When I would go from Wareham to Marion, they kept me back

I had [my name] changed when, after I got involved with the... it was not called the African-American movement... it was the "Colored Movement" back then (as they say the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)...

20. Salah Matteos/Viriato Gonçalves Interview

But after I did my tour of duty in the Korean War... It was in Korea where for the first time, in the service, I began to understand a little bit about what difference it was being Cape Verdean or other people being what they were... because going into the military, they didn't know what outfit to put me in. Because my father was very fair... And went into the white outfit then... When it got to me, they weren't sure because when they looked at me there was a difference...and they said 'well they were going to put me in a white outfit and I said, no you're not! If you send me somewhere down south, there's no way in the world they're gonna know that I'm white!' and they said, well, if you're going to go in then we're going to have to classify you as a Negro." So I became classified as a Negro...

Arguably, many Cape Verdean American men and women (if not most) of Salah's generation experienced a so-called "Negro" phase; this phenomenon has continued until now where it is evident that some newer and younger Cape Verdean arrivals in the US embrace commercial, African-American hip hop identity. It is critical – in my opinion – for youth and organizers who work with youth to understand the history behind these dynamics, a history that includes pioneers such as Salah Matteos. After his introduction to the work of Cabral by Malcolm X, and his learning of the war for independence being waged at the time, Salah decided to leverage the connections he had to travel to Africa and try to join the fight. On his own, he travelled to Guinea Bissau in search of Cabral (who he would never meet there, but only later after returning to the US) and in search, perhaps, for a resolution to his own personal, political and spiritual journey.

Scholars of African-American history will recognize many parallels in Salah's story when compared with the path of the late Amiri Baraka, a student of Cabralism and someone considered to be one of the architects of the black arts movement. He is also respected as a scholar/theoretician who shaped black thought and black culture in the US. Like Salah, Baraka was influenced by Cabral and became radicalized and resolved in his own black political identity after traveling abroad in the military and later through a life-changing trip to Cuba. He helped organize the 1972 Africa Information Service US visit of Cabral to Syracuse, NY where he delivered the oft-quoted address "Connecting the Struggles" in a meeting with African-American leaders and others representing over 30 organizations.

This visit had a profound impact on Baraka and his supporters, as well as affecting the minds and identity politics of Cape Verdean Americans such as Salah Matteos. In fact, roughly one year later, the assassination of Cabral marked a critical shift – heightening the radicalization of many – similar to what the death of Malcolm X did in 1965. In a 1974 *NY Times* article, Amiri

Baraka reflected on this. The article explains, “he had been profoundly influenced by the writings of Amilcar Cabral, a contemporary revolutionary figure who was killed in Portuguese Guinea.”²¹ The piece affirms the ripple effect of Baraka’s discovery of Cabralism. “The philosophical shift by one of the few surviving militants in the black movement is considered by others in the movement at least as significant as the shift made by the late Malcolm X when he returned from Mecca.”²² The conclusion to be drawn from these parallel experiences is an affirmation that Cabral’s imprint upon the US black experience and the evolution of black political identity is clear.

Conclusion: Before and After (CV)

If we are to track a chronology of the ideology and identity politics of “black” people and blackness, that accounting would be incomplete without the role of Cabral and Cape Verdeans in the US who have contributed to every American war since independence, every pivotal national struggle such as the 1950’s-1960’s Civil Rights Movement, and to African-American popular culture (think of the recently deceased Horace Silver, considered one of the greatest Jazz musicians). In order to fully appreciate Cape Verdean American history, it is necessary to engage with black or African-American history as this is the community to which we have most often been associated (even when we have chosen not to identify as such). African-American historical tropes give us a framework for understanding the experiences of leaders such as Salah Matteos, discriminated against in schools, in military and in life. However, as a Cape Verdean, as members of multiple, overlapping diasporas, we cannot examine Cape Verdeans in the US through this lens alone. African Diaspora studies give us the theoretical guidelines for understanding the phenomenon that is the complex, immeasurable Cape Verdean Diaspora – an inextricably intertwined physical, emotional, socio-political, cultural and virtual or cyber diaspora. And finally, we must look to the voices of Cape Verdeans themselves – through oral histories such as the one recounted here of Salah Matteos and scholarly examinations of those testimonies – to adequately sum up our contemporary historical picture of US Cape Verdeans and the identity politics that have impacted them from outside of and within their own communities.

21. Sullivan, Joseph F. “Baraka Drops ‘Racism’ for Socialism of Marx,” *NYTimes* Dec. 27, 1974.

22. Ibid.

For example, pioneering Cape Verdean intellectual, activist and prolific author, Donaldo Macedo, outlines this parallel identity revolution in the following passage:

Before the independence of Cape Verde in 1975, schools functioned as political sites in which class, gender, and racial inequities were both produced and reproduced. In essence, the colonial education structure served to inculcate Capeverdeans with myths and beliefs that denied and belittled their lived experiences, their history, their culture, and their language. ... This system could not help but reproduce in children and youth the profile that the colonial ideology itself had created for them, namely that of inferior beings, lacking in all ability. On the one hand, schooling in Cape Verde served the purpose of deculturating Capeverdeans; on the other hand, it acculturated them into a predefined colonial model. ... Thus colonial schools were successful to the extent that they created a petit-bourgeois class of functionaries who had internalized the belief that they had become "white" or "black with white souls," and were therefore superior to African peasants, who still practiced what was viewed as barbaric culture. ... After independence and in the reconstruction of a new society in Cape Verde, schools started assumed as their major task the 'decolonization mentality,' as it is termed by Aristides Pereira, and which Amilcar Cabral called the 're-Africanization mentality.'²³

The ideas of re-Africanization and "connecting the struggles" (Cape Verdean and African-American) are the themes that give context to Salah Matteos's journey to self-awareness. Amilcar Cabral's own voyages within Guinea and Cape Verde, and all over the world including the US, resulted in the profound theories that became his legacy. These ideas allowed such self-awareness to come to light for the Cape Verdean population as a whole – and many would argue – for people all over the African Diaspora, giving us the power to name ourselves and laying the foundation for further intellectual and political struggle.

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23. Donaldo Macedo, From Paper "The Reproduction of Colonialism in Cape Verde through Language" for *Whose History Is It?* 2010 Conference, Brown University, RI.

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