



*Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast* | **TRANSCRIPT**  
Episode 3: Conversation with Orlando L. Taylor Award Winner Joëlle M. Cruz

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**Participants:**

Trevor Parry-Giles  
Orlando L. Taylor  
Joëlle M. Cruz

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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Welcome to *Communication Matters, the NCA Podcast*. I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

**Introduction:**

This is *Communication Matters, the NCA Podcast*.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

And in this episode of *Communication Matters*, I'm really fortunate to be speaking with Joëlle M. Cruz, Assistant Professor in the College of Media, Communication and Information at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Dr. Cruz was recently honored as the first recipient of NCA's Orlando L. Taylor Distinguished Scholarship Award in Africana Communication. The Taylor Award honors a scholar whose body of work demonstrates a sustained commitment to the study of African-American and/or the African Diaspora communication and culture. Dr. Cruz's research in the area of alternative organizing contributes significantly to understanding ways that black women grapple with entrepreneurship in post-conflict situations in both Africa and the United States. Richly sourced and engaging, Dr. Cruz's scholarship demonstrates that other compelling ideas can reside at the center of intellectual thought including African and African-American feminist theories and organizing. Already this boundary-altering young scholar has published 11 journal articles and five book chapters and gained international recognition for research on transnational institutional dynamics surrounding the African Diaspora. So, in this episode, I'll be



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speaking with Dr. Cruz about the research that she's done on alternative organizing, black feminist thought and indigenous organizing.

But, as an added bonus, before talking with Dr. Cruz, I'm thrilled to introduce Dr. Orlando L. Taylor in whose honor the new award was named. Dr. Taylor is currently the distinguished senior advisor to the president at Fielding Graduate University. Dr. Taylor's research focuses on communication disorders and linguistics and he's been a leading advocate for access and equity in higher education and was the first African-American president of NCA. Hey, Orlando, it's great to see you and thanks for coming on *Communication Matters*.

**Orlando L. Taylor:**

Thank you so much. It's really great to be here.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

You've spent much of your career advocating for access and equity in higher ed. Could you offer some perspective on what this award means and how it advances that agenda to achieve greater equity and access in higher education?

**Orlando L. Taylor:**

Well, thank you, Trevor. That's really an important question and I must say that it's really heart-rendering to see this moment happen, to really sit next to the first recipient of this award. It's all about her. It's not about me at all. It really is a moment when we really celebrate and recognize the significant contribution not only of African-Americans but people of color in communication and especially looking at topics that relate to the global context of Africana communication. And I think it's significant that her work has focused on women. Much of the work in gender studies has focused disproportionately on white women, not that much, some but not enough, on African-American women or African women in the African context. And so, to expand the boundaries, to expand the boundaries of the subject of gender and diversity and inclusion to include this perspective is extremely important and I'm extremely honored to be able to sit next to Dr. Cruz today and to be a part of recognizing her for her work and to celebrate what she's contributed.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

What would you say is the contribution from Dr. Cruz and other younger African-American scholars and scholars of Africana communication to the communication discipline more broadly?

**Orlando L. Taylor:**

Number one, I think that it's important to note that we have a significant increase in the presence of African-Americans and other persons from the African Diaspora in the field of communication. Back when I first became a member of what was then the Speech Communication Association in



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the late 1960s, I was telling Dr. Cruz earlier I think most African-Americans knew all the other African-American members and today where we have such a large network of persons, persons from a variety of institutions studying a variety of things, not just limited to issues around African-American communication speaks to the universality of the discipline and one that recognizes that for us to be truly inclusive to the research, to the advance theory, to advance practice in communication, we really have to do it taking it in a way that takes into account the diversity of our people not only in this country but around the world. In the early days, of course, when we talked about African-American communication, the focus was often on a disorder, for example. It was often these persons who spoke varieties of American English that reflected African heritage were often thought to be appropriate for special education. Or another approach was the stereotypes that often occurred in the media through minstrel shows, through comedy that kind of made a buffoonery model out of communication in African-American communities. What we see today is a much broader notion about the contributions of African people from around the world and to what communication is about. We legitimized the notion that people communicate very appropriately within the context of their cultures and their histories. It is our responsibility as scholars to document and codify those behaviors so that we can have a better understanding of the human condition.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

That's a great segue to our discussion with Dr. Cruz and probing a little more about what your research is all about. But first, before I do that, I want to congratulate you. This is very exciting for all of us at NCA to have the inaugural recipient of the Orlando Taylor Award. So many people in our discipline and in the association worked hard to bring this award to fruition. And so, it's thrilling to have you here and to be able to talk to you about your research. The segue that I thought of from what Orlando was talking about has to do with what exactly you're interested in which is this alternative organizing because I think Orlando's right. It is a direct sort of advancement of how we've talked about diverse communication practices and I'm interested in having you tell us a little bit more about what alternative organizing is all about.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Thank you so much. I'm so honored to be here today with you and to be the recipient of that award. So, in terms of alternative organizing, really here we're thinking about alternative organizing on two levels really. First, really it's about underrepresented forms of organizing when we think about the field of organizational communication. And then secondly, you can also think about alternative organizing in terms of how we even understand organizing or organization in everyday life. For many people, we tend to think of organizations only as corporations or businesses still. So, on the contrary, alternative organizing includes social movements, grassroots organizing, indigenous organizing and community-based organizing as well. So, these would be all forms of alternatives.



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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

So, beyond talking about alternative types of organizing, how else does this approach and your research to alternative organizing challenge or push or advance existing org comm scholarship.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Great. So, that's a wonderful question and very important too. So, we can think about this research really as first decolonizing the field of organizational communication which has tended to center and focus on again normative modes of organizing including corporations, businesses and to some extent also non-profits but also center those in Western context and here we're thinking specifically about the dominance of the United States in that type of work. There is very rarely research that has been done even within the U.S. on black communities. There is some and here I acknowledge the work of Patricia Parker, Brenda Allen, for instance. But it's still quite rare even within the U.S. to look at black people and it's even harder to find when you examine Africa actually where that research again needs to grow. And yes, we need to work and do more of that work.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

And you've been specifically interested with organizing in Liberia.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Yes, correct.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

So, can you tell us a little bit more about the—what are they called?—the susu groups?

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

The susu groups.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

In Liberia and the extent to which the conflict nature of Liberian politics over the last, I don't know, decades has influenced this form and practice of alternative organizing.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Sure. So, I'll start by defining the susu groups. These are pre-colonial indigenous types of forums that exist not just in Liberia but in many other parts of West Africa. And these are community banks that women put together to be able to raise money and this is really helpful for people who don't have access to banks. So, for instance, you put four people together, you say that each day each person is going to donate to the bank \$5, you have \$20 and each person then takes a turn



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and cashes the \$20 and that allows you if you have a small business to go and buy more supplies for your business. Again, very helpful when you don't access to banking. So, that's the susu. In terms of thinking about the second part of the question which was...

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

How they operate within the sort of conflictual context of Liberian politics and the Liberian economy. I'm curious about how these groups which remind me sort of like microloans programs in Bangladesh and other places in Asia, how do they operate within the Liberian context specifically?

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Right, right. Yes. So, these were really very important both during the war and also in post-conflict times. They've had remarkably continuity if you think about both context. So, during war, for instance, the misconception is that they had collapsed entirely but, in fact, it was not the case which showcases the resilience of those structures. People started back susu during the war when there was some type of period that was calmer than other times. So, they would resume and stop, resume and stop. And then right after the war in 2003, they reorganized more permanently. That's also a key characteristic of those resilient structures to put themselves to put themselves back together extremely fast and that was based really, that's my claim, on the fact that they are trust-based and they're bounded, if you want, by human interactional types of ties and communication is key to that. But they rely not as much on material resources which means that they can operate very quickly without a building, without supplies, without even that much money.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

I would think that this would contribute pretty significantly to research that's underway about resilience generally because that's such a powerful concept I guess in contemporary communication research.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Right, right.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

I'm also really interested in how you study these groups because black feminist autoethnography or black feminist ethnography generally sounds fascinating and I'm curious if you could talk a little bit more about how that works, how you do that, all of that.



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**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

So, I'm embedded in black feminist frameworks but also for that project I used more specifically an African feminist type of ethnography which is my take on black feminist ethnography and that one really was based on three principles that I really worked around in my work. So, the first principle, if you think about it, black feminist or African feminist ethnography specifically would be the principle of holism—that's one—which would be embedded in world views that are not binaries and that are very holistic. So, here rather than thinking of the sanctions that are usual even in Western feminism like private versus public, men versus women, right? We think of those African contexts as contexts where people blurred these sanctions very easily and the example in terms of the market woman was that the market in itself where they did their work was also a space for community. So, it wasn't just a workspace. Children came in and out freely, men/partners came in often and also freely here. So, that's holism.

But there's also a principle then of collectivity which is based on holism and this is telling us that African feminisms are considered a group rather than the individual as a unit of analysis and in that sense, the susu groups exemplify this principle because it was not just about us saving money. In a Western logic, it would make sense that I'm just using the group to get my money out. But here, what was really even more important was to organize as a group and to have that group fulfil that function of collectivism beyond just cashing out money.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Real community building.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Right.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Yeah. That's great.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Yes. Third principle was situationally which tells us that people and the women I was looking at within that context value really being able to respond to a variety of shifting conditions in context and that that response can be varied. So, I'll give you an example. The groups, for instance, sometimes chose to be invisible and sometimes also chose to be very visible by making themselves known to the market authority which didn't always know they existed and that was always done situationally and is this advantageous for me right now to do.



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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

That's really fascinating. That's great. And then, you went to Liberia and what? Did interviews? Did you work amongst this group? Did you just talk to a wide range of people? Talk about the ethnography side of all of this.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Sure, so, I did a market ethnography during 2011 actually for my dissertation which was based in a food market in Liberia.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Cool.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

And during that time, I conducted about 100 hours of participant observation that entailed me going every morning to the market around 8:00 until 5:00 and observing, then going outside to take notes in between because I couldn't take notes in the market really. People weren't comfortable.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Sure. Right.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Over time as I built relationships with the women, they allowed me to eventually start selling for them at some points. So, then I also took a more active role towards the end especially where I would sell some market items.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

That's great.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

They started calling me for some of them my daughter and outside the market on occasions I was recognized and sometimes people would even say oh, that's woman is selling in the market.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

That's funny.

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

So, that was quite funny.



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**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Would you call this a form of indigenous organizing as well?

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Yes, absolutely.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Okay, okay. Is there anything particular to indigenous epistemologies and the precarity of indigeneity in some of these cultures that has an impact on the ways in which they collectively organize do you think?

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Oh, that's such a great question. I think with the three principles I was bringing up, I was trying to get at that. Right? Especially the holism and collectivism that are getting at least in West Africa at particular indigenous types of world views that did not center again the individual per se but rather the group as a unit. I belong to a group and I make sense of myself and I even communicate as much as I'm able to articulate my relation to other groups as opposed to a person on her own or his own. So, I think that was really where some of the indigenous bits or parts came through.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Yeah. It's a really nice combination of sort of a feminist epistemology and a feminist outlook alongside this indigenous outlook. I think that's fascinating. Finally, I'd be interested in your thoughts on what your research and what this whole different orientation might mean for the future of communication research more broadly. How do we rethink and how do we reconceptualize both practically and also sort of epistemological I suppose what your work can tell us about where generally communication research needs to go?

**Joëlle M. Cruz:**

Perhaps the first one as we ask these questions would be the people who we are identifying or the agents that are important in making this happen and obviously there is a researcher like myself, right, for anybody who wants to do that work. I think it takes—it's a commitment. It's labor intensive not just in the regular sense that research requires labor but also that process and that work on decolonizing I think also sometimes can be extra work actually because I think it's a responsibility that we have to show people that actually there is another way, that this way is as acceptable and as valid than dominant types of models or norms. So, for those doing that work, I would say be brave and committed. That's really key. But also I would say that it's not just up to us but to a variety of other gatekeepers including other scholars in our own subfields but also to organizations like, for instance, NCA which has been over the years showcasing that type of work and making way for us to actually be able even to see that and envision this as a possibility and





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to undertake these types of projects. So, that's also key. And then, I would expand that even to journals in the field where sometimes again it can be challenging for people doing that work. At various stages, I think the responsibility should be shared and acknowledged that it's also collective in the tradition of African feminisms too, right?

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

Orlando needs to add a final thought.

**Orlando L. Taylor:**

Yes. I think that what we just heard from Dr. Cruz really speaks to the importance of this work to the whole discipline of communication, that the scholarship that we do is really a quest for truth, truth with a capital T if you will. And historically, we've looked more often at Western models of communication. We've really not taken into account in a serious way models of communication that come from outside the Western part of the globe. And so, at the early stages of our work in advancing Africana communication in the discipline, many people thought we're trying to make a political statement. We just really want to do this because it's the right thing to do as civil rights and all of that. No, it's bigger than that. It's about really a quest for truth and this research that Dr. Cruz has just described gives us a really great sense that truth exists in many forms and it's the totality of truths that we can identify that gets us closer to understanding truth in the total human context.

**Trevor Parry-Giles:**

That's a great way to wrap it up. So, thank you, Orlando. I think you're absolutely right and having an award in Africana communication is exactly what a fulfillment of what you're trying envision. Again, thanks to everybody for joining us. On a sad note, all of us at NCA are mourning the passing in January of two past presidents, James Chesebro and Kenneth Anderson. Professor Chesebro passed away on January 21st and Dr. Anderson on January 26th. James Chesebro served as NCA's 82nd president in 1996. As David McMahon wrote in a tribute to Jim, "With Jim's passing, the discipline of communication has lost one of its giants. He dedicated himself to the promotion and development of the discipline through his scholarship, through his extraordinary record of service and through a countless number of students and colleagues who continue to be influenced by his exceptional teaching and guidance.

Among numerous additional awards for scholarship, service, and teaching, Jim was the recipient of the National Communication Association Golden Anniversary Monograph Award, the Samuel L. Becker Distinguished Service Award, the Robert J. Kibler Memorial Award, the Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education and the Wallace A. Bacon Lifetime Teaching Excellence Award. And from ECA, the Eastern Communication Association, Chesebro received the Everett Lee Hunt Award and was a Distinguished Research Fellow and a



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Distinguished Teaching Fellow. The James W. Chesebro Award for Scholarly Distinction in Sexuality Research is presented in his honor by the Central States Communication Association to scholars who have made significant contributions to the study of gender, sexuality and sexual identity.

Dedicated to enhancing the discipline of communication and expanding the scope of its influence, Jim held over 200 service roles throughout his career. He served as president of NCA in 1996 and served on the executive committee and legislative assembly over a 16-year period of time. He chaired the publication's council from 1986 through 1988 and was director of educational services for NCA here in the national office from 1989 through 1992. He had earlier served as president of the Eastern Communication Association and had co-founded the Speech Communication Association of Puerto Rico. He also served as editor of *Communication Quarterly*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication* and the *Review of Communication* at various points throughout his career. Everyone at NCA sends our condolences to Professor Chesebro's brows family and friends, particularly Jim's husband and partner for nearly 40 years, Donald Bonsall. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Terre Haute Indiana Humane Society."

Dr. Kenneth Anderson served as NCA's 69th president in 1983. An Iowa native, Dr. Anderson spent the majority of his long teaching career at the University of Illinois. Following his 1961 doctorate, Dr. Anderson served briefly as a visiting professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago and at the University of Southern California. He then taught at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor before relocating in 1970 to the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, eventually retiring as professor emeritus of communication in 1995. At Illinois, in addition to teaching and administrative appointments in the Department of Communication, he served as an associate dean in the college, interim head of the speech communication department and later of the speech and hearing science department and a deputy vice-chancellor of academic affairs. Professor Anderson was also active in numerous disciplinary associations including serving in multiple roles for NCA such as the finance board chair, convention planner and president. He was recognized with the association's Distinguished Service Award.

In addition, Dr. Anderson served as executive secretary, convention planner and president of the Central States Communication Association and as president of the National Association of Communication Administrators. His focus on communication ethics led him to serve as the conference planner and keynote speaker at the NCA 1999 summer conference that formulated the credo for ethical communication later adopted by the association and in force today. Dr. Anderson believed that this was his greatest enduring contribution to the field of communication.



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From Dr. Anderson's obituary, there is this quotation that reflects his belief in a life well-lived. "I have been incredibly lucky in life. My wife, my son and his family, my profession and chosen discipline and an incredible range of experiences. As Aristotle stressed in his doctrine of choices, good choices are basic to a good life in a good community." We send our sincerest condolences to Dr. Anderson's family, friends and colleagues. Memorial contributions may be made to the Kenneth E and Mary Klaaren Andersen fund in support of the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in Urbana-Champaign.

In NCA news, the NCA year-end review is online and should have arrived in members' mailboxes last month. The year-end review highlights just some of NCA's 2019 work including the NCA public programs on environmental communication, our new concepts in communication video series and a lot of other ways that NCA advances the discipline. Also, in NCA news, the spring committee on international discussion and debate or CIDD Series will begin later this month when Japanese students Yuto Watanabe and Takuto Kasahara travel to the United States to visit 11 U.S. host campuses to debate with U.S. students. CIDD is one of NCA's oldest programs and it promotes international understanding and the practice of communication through discussion and debates between students from the United States and other nations. You can discover if a CIDD debate will be happening near you by going to [natcom.org/CIDD](http://natcom.org/CIDD). And listeners, we hope you tune in for the next episode of *Communication Matters* in just two weeks. I'll be chatting with Communication Professor Emeritus Rick Cherwitz from the University of Texas and Catherine Baxter, Director of Partnerships at the OpEd Project about why it's important for communication scholars to use their expertise to write op eds and how they can get involved in these public facing writing projects.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms and our communities and in our world. See you next time.

**Conclusion:**

*Communication Matters* is hosted by NCA executive director Trevor Parry-Giles and is recorded in our national office in downtown Washington DC. The podcast is recorded and produced by Assistant Director for Digital Strategies Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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