



**AFRICAN HISTORIES AND MODERNITIES**

# **ILÊ AIYÊ IN BRAZIL AND THE REINVENTION OF AFRICA**

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**Niyi Afolabi**



# AFRICAN HISTORIES AND MODERNITIES

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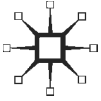
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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Masking traditions have their mysteries that only seasoned masqueraders can decipher. As I came to terms with my own self-discovery in Carnival politics, I almost succumbed to the temptation of simply following the tradition of “Acknowledgments” and thus abbreviating this narrative. Yet, for some reasons I cannot explain to myself, this “Preface” is begging to be written. This book is more than just an academic exercise. It has indeed taken on a political life of its own. As with every new project, it has accumulated, along the way, a long list of debts to well-wishers and anonymous detractors alike. Long in its gestation and execution, the challenge of placing it within the academic tradition has also been a rewarding lesson in resilience. The interplay of our academic games and the imminence of divine providence comes with a dose of humility in the face of the ideology of content, the magic of form, and the power of vetting by the professional gatekeepers who bask in their arrogated duty as they struggle between biased perception and the powerful “truth” that Ilê Aiyê asserts. Of course, Carnival means something different to different individuals. As the Yoruba put it in their infinite proverbial wisdom, “the agile masquerader knows the perplexed observer; but the perplexed observer knows not the agile masquerader.” For Ilê Aiyê, Carnival is about racial relations, pride in blackness in all its struggling manifestations within a stifling “racial democracy,” and the sustained quest for social justice through persistent demand for racial equality and political power.

Ilê Aiyê celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2014. It was a joyful moment during that year’s Carnival parade all over Salvador, Bahia. I had nourished the hope that this book would have been published then as a form of celebration of a long journey in masking politics. Though that was not to be, there will still be a golden jubilee, as the president of the organization, Vovô, assured me, while I posed the question of what he would like to see happen when he was no longer in the picture. His simple answer, of wanting to see the Ilê Aiyê tradition continue, rekindled my own positive energy as participant and insider-outsider critic. The critical distance that the researcher naturally possesses is often blurred by the many years of associating with an organization that is now globalized

beyond the wildest imagination of its founders in 1974. Though I came to know the organization in 1982, my own curiosity about Carnival goes back to 1980, when as young Nigerian undergraduates, and while taking Brazilian culture classes with Brazilian professors in Nigeria, we thought of putting on a Brazilian Carnival parade at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). Our professor, Antônio Vieira da Silva, a *baiano* of blessed memory, quickly discouraged the idea by asserting with some curious conviction that only Americans and Europeans knew what Carnival was about. He ended his statement with: “And that is my pride, I am Brazilian!” Such an assertion could only have challenged me to want to understand what he meant when I finally got my opportunity to study and live in Brazil.

Is masking tradition really exclusive to Brazilians, North Americans, and Europeans? Nothing could be further from the truth. Every human society, I would argue, has its own Carnival or feasting tradition. Festivals are as ancient as human life itself. I grew up in Lagos, Nigeria, closely following colorful and exuberant masquerades that represented for us the living spirits of the ancestors. They were one of our few interactions with the world that defied the mundane, the ordinary, and the day-to-day; not just the indigenous ones, but even those that the returnees living in the Brazilian Quarter of Lagos brought back from Brazil. Even as I went to the same mission schools as the children of the returnees bearing names such as Da Silva, Vera Cruz, Da Rocha, Salvador, Gomez, Veríssimo, Da Costa, and Olympio, among others, I also participated in their festivals such as the *Bumba-Meu-Boi* and *Carreta*. We did not even call these localized festivals “Carnivals.” They were, in contrast to the indigenous masking traditions in Lagos (such as *Oloolu* or *Eyo*), more popular and less intimidating in terms of the air of sacredness that accompanied their staging.

It is quite interesting now to see the Brazilian side of things when masking tradition becomes inevitably political. It goes beyond just a performance for the sake of performance; indeed it goes beyond merrymaking for the sake of merrymaking; for Carnival in Brazil must deal with the politics of race relations and inequalities even amid the air of collective enjoyment and apparent “equality.” A quick reality check: not everyone can afford the annual Carnival costume, and most have to pay for it in installments. This implies that, as popular as Carnival is, it is not for everyone, but exists within the context of belonging to an association or parading on the streets within the confines of privileged group dynamics. Ilê Aiyê’s politics, as with similar Afro-Bahian Carnival organizations such as Olodum, Muzenza, Cortejo Afro, Didá, and A Mulherada, among many others, must be seen as community based, ideology infused,

and creatively inscribed in a larger cultural and performative body politics that strives for better awareness of the implications of Carnival for race, gender, and class dynamics.

My debts are numerous. First and foremost, I must thank the Warfield Center for African and African American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin (especially under the directorship of Professors Omi Osun Joni Jones and Frank Guridy) for its generous funds that allowed me to travel extensively to Brazil between 2008 and 2015 to conduct archival research and ethnographic interviews; to observe and collect samples of material culture and costumes; and to participate in Ilê Aiyê's Afro-Bahian Carnival. In the early stages of the research, specifically in the summer of 2011, the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS), under the leadership of Professor Edmund Gordon, also provided me with a supplementary summer grant while I was directing a study-abroad program in Salvador. This allowed me to arrive in Salvador much sooner and stay on after the program to focus on this book project. Second, I thank Vovô, the president of Ilê Aiyê, for giving me unlimited access to the archives of the organization. Third, I am grateful to all the research participants, in and outside of Ilê Aiyê, including, but not limited to, Jacilda Trindade Teles dos Santos, Billy Arquimimo, Dr. Cheryl Sterling, Joseane Guimarães, Raimundo Nascimento, Bamba, Aliomar de Jesus Almeida, Geruse Menezes, Macalé, Anizaldo Ferreira de Sousa Filho, Woman X, Edmilson Lopes da Neves, Hildelice Benta dos Santos, Erval Soares Souza, Rivanildo Divino, Jurim Assunção dos Santos, Joseane Paim, Maria Luísa Monte Correia, Ana Amélia Dias Santos, Ademilton Jesus Santos, Vinícius Silva da Silva, Ardubor D. Silva, Roseane Pereira Alves, Mohammed Camara, Alex Sandro Teles, Gelton de Oliveira, Maria Luísa Passos dos Santos, Aline Cristina Pereira Reis, Alzilema Purificação Santo Barme, Jureli França Bonfim, Arlindo Conceição, and Antônio Carlos Taiwo Boa Morte dos Santos. In case I left anyone out, it is unintentional.

This book has hibernated for too long in my own estimation. I must not forget the timely mentoring of Professor Toyin Falola, who, to my chagrin at the time, asked for the subject of my new book project immediately upon my arrival in Austin; an awkward time indeed, as I had a book that was already forthcoming and for which I was still answering editorial queries. In hindsight, it was a learning experience, as a project that I thought was going to take no more than five years when I embarked upon it (given my familiarity with the topic) ended up taking almost ten years to see the light of day.

Pertinent institutional support must equally not go unacknowledged. I thank Dean Randy Diehl for granting me a College Research

Fellowship in the spring semester of 2014, which enabled me to complete the remaining writing and fine-tune aspects of the book project. In the same vein of institutional recognition, I am grateful to Professor Gregory Vincent, the vice president of Diversity and Community Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, for rewarding my international community engagement efforts with cultural and educational NGOs (such as Ilê Aiyê, Olodum, Steve Biko Institute, Escola Aberta, and Didá), by presenting me with one of the Tower Awards, specifically, the Academic Service Learning Professor Award in 2013. For the inestimable support from colleagues and staff in the departments of African and African Diaspora Studies, Spanish, and Portuguese, I am very appreciative.

I would also be remiss not to thank the anonymous readers, the copy-editor, and the editorial and production team at Palgrave, especially Kristin Purdy and Michelle Smith. The Palgrave design duo, Paileen Currie and Will Speed, performed a creative feat by translating ideology into marketing beauty with their magical artistic concepts for which I am grateful. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Arlen Nydam, who went beyond the call of duty by coming to the rescue in order to meet the submission deadline, especially at a time when I was suffering from trepidation and anxiety. Finally, in the spirit of Carnival and regeneration, I dedicate this book to my beloved parents, a book for which they would be proud to unveil their mask. For the uninitiated have eyes in abundance, but their vision is limited; as a consequence, they cannot even attempt the least foray into the many mysteries of marvelous masking.

NIYI AFOLABI  
Austin, Texas, 2015

## INTRODUCTION

The fortieth anniversary celebration of the pioneering Afro-Brazilian Carnival group, Ilê Aiyê (House of Life), was a riveting spectacle in the 2014 Bahian Carnival, during which members of the celebrated “O Mais Belo dos Belos” (The Most Beautiful of the Beautiful) joyfully and energetically showcased Afro-Brazilian heritage on the streets of Salvador, Bahia (Brazil). Through the lens of Africa, Ilê Aiyê translates its mission to affirm black consciousness, even as a pretext to protest racial discrimination in Brazil. The group was founded in 1974 while Brazil was still under military dictatorship and has since become an iconic reference point for various black movements as they grapple with marginality and struggle for elusive political power. While Ilê Aiyê restricts its membership to only blacks, all racial and cultural backgrounds are encouraged to participate in its events such as the *Carnaval* parades, the *Cortejos da Negritude* (black heritage) parades, and the *Lavagem (da Igreja) do Bonfim* (Washing of the Good End Church) outing, among others. Robed in the organization’s vital colors of red, yellow, black, and white, parading members of Ilê Aiyê move slowly, choreographically, and systematically, dancing to *ijexá* (a Yoruba ethnic group) rhythms, which are derived from Candomblé’s religious rites. Ever since the group won the naming of one of the Carnival circuits after Mãe Hilda, mother of the founder of Ilê Aiyê (Vovô or Grandpa), the route has symbolized a homage to Hilda Dias dos Santos (1923–2009), *mãe de santo* (Candomblé priestess), and guardian spirit of the cultural organization.

Located in Curuzu-Liberdade, a neighborhood with the greatest number of black residents in Salvador with visible expressions of black heritage and pride, Ilê Aiyê programs many activities throughout the year that culminate in the grand Carnival festivities in February or March. For example, Band’Erê, its percussion, singing, and dance school, works throughout the school year with children from Curuzu and surrounding areas; the Dança Afro group incorporates young graduates from Band’Erê for local, national, and international shows; the Escola Profissionalizante, a vocational school, prepares young adults for self-sufficiency in the labor market; while the Mãe Hilda School trains pre- and elementary-school

children. Three weeks before Carnival, and during the *Noite da Beleza Negra* (Night of Black Beauty) event, Ilê Aiyê selects its Ebony Goddess for the coming year. The contest, which has helped boost the appreciation of black beauty in Brazil, values not only the candidates' natural beauty or the gracefulness of their dance moves but also, above all, their pride in their ethnicity and community engagement. Cyntia Paixão was the 2014 Ebony Goddess and she was active in all the Carnival parades as well as in serving as a visible representative of the organization until the selection of a new Ebony Goddess at the next Black Beauty pageant.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

As empowering as Ilê Aiyê appears to Afro-Brazilians in Salvador, where an estimated 80 percent of the population is visibly Afro-Brazilian, the organization suffers from institutional violence in the forms of racism, economic exclusion, residential marginalization, and political powerlessness. Though Ilê Aiyê was founded to combat white racism, teach black pride, and celebrate African heritage, it continues to struggle structurally and financially to deliver on this desirable ideological mission of 1974—especially in the context of Salvador's insertion into the global tourist industry and the consequent commodification of Afro-Brazilian culture in the twenty-first century. This organizational quagmire results in inevitable tensions between resistance to being bought out of its primary struggle for racial equality by white market forces, and the exigencies of modernization and management of scarce resources that are often sponsored by the state or by industry. Since Carnival in Bahia has become a million-dollar industry, Carnival organizations such as Ilê Aiyê and Olodum are compelled to rethink their initial goals of parading in order to showcase African history and Afro-Brazilian cultures as modes of resistance. Not only do they need to factor in the exigencies of other growing Carnival organizations that are no longer small, informal groupings, they must now also deal with a more corporate, elaborate, and expensive spectacle on a global scale while simultaneously negotiating their vital mission of resistance against all vestiges of racism in Brazil.

This book examines the major Afro-Brazilian Carnival group, Ilê Aiyê of Salvador, Bahia, as a cultural enterprise struggling with the exigencies of modernity and globalization, and within the stifling socio-economic and marginalizing political dispensation that Afro-Brazilians grapple with. Involving extended fieldwork and analysis, the book not only challenges our understanding of Carnival as a naively perceived setting of fantasy, festival, and folly, but also showcases a complex stage where the dramas and tensions of a society are played out, negotiated,

and reinvented before, during, and after Carnival. Conceptually, this study argues that, despite the limitations of racialized ideology in an era of shifting political, transatlantic, diasporic, and pragmatic negotiations, Ilê Aiyê finds itself in a challenging and problematic situation. On the one hand, it is desirous of political power, and on the other, it is reluctant to sacrifice the moral integrity of representing the marginalized population whose voice would virtually be erased without the resistant posture of spirituality, consciousness raising, and cultural performance that Ilê Aiyê integrates during and after Carnival. The current debate, as well as the consequences of symbolically “accepting” whites (in the context of a support group) into an organization formerly accused of “reverse racism” (due to their claim of 100 percent blackness as a defiant ideological motto), raises questions as to the extent to which Ilê Aiyê can continue to resist the exigencies of market forces and globalization imperatives that are now compelling it to rethink its strategies.

African diaspora Carnivals as a whole have often focused primarily on the touristic aspect of the celebration while neglecting the more subtle and strategic process of negotiation between hegemonic structures and marginalized populations and communities. In Brazil, the scenario is no different: the national festivity is fundamentally a source of economic return for the tourism industry. Understandable as this economic aspect is to the overall development of a nation, the festival also creates regional discrimination within national unity and diversity, as the main focus is usually on Rio de Janeiro Carnival, which attracts millions of international merrymakers. Bahia, a northeastern Brazilian state where the presence of Africans can be seen in many areas of cultural dynamics, continues to receive less attention. In his *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes* (1979), Roberto DaMatta, the major comparative scholar of Carnival as a sociological phenomenon in Brazil and the United States, has problematically suggested that Rio Carnival is more participatory than that of New Orleans. The question of participation and development has equally been addressed by me in “The Myth of the Participatory Paradigm.”<sup>1</sup> Despite these efforts to move beyond the temporary performance, tourism, and the (mis)representation of the socio-economic reality of the people, very few studies have attempted to examine the links between culture and politics, and the use of the latter as an instrument of liberation, negotiation, and empowerment.

Sheila Walker (1984), Daniel Crowley (1984, 1985), Christopher Dunn (1992, 1994), Barbara Browning (1995), Piers Armstrong (2001), Ângela Schaun (2002), and Jônatas Silva (2004), have contributed effectively to the discourse of Afro-Bahian Carnival from their varying perspectives. Most have addressed it as an Afrocentric ritual and a gendered performance through which cultural entities and individuals are able to



express discontent, temporarily free themselves from the frustrations of daily routine, take pride in their ancestral connections with Africa, and demonstrate their organizational abilities by staging one of the finest moments of ecstatic celebration in the world. Yet, the organized event remains at the level of symbologies and mythologies while the politics continues to be reduced to “conformism and resistance.” In the context of *Ilê Aiyê* specifically, other scholars, namely Michel Agier (1992, 1996, 2000), Florentina Souza (2002), Walter Sousa Jr. (2007), and Ana Lúcia Araújo (2010), also engage the dynamics of black empowerment in Bahian political structure. Not only do they highlight strategies against racism, they also raise issues of identity and the representation of Africa, and the tensions between antiracist posture and the exigencies of modernity and market forces—which may provide a potential context for the critique of *Ilê Aiyê*’s co-optation.

By focusing on one Afro-Bahian Carnival organization, namely, *Ilê Aiyê* of Salvador, this book investigates the connections between the emergence of the organization within the Unified Black Movement (MNU) in the seventies, while examining the roles played by ideology, religiosity, spirituality, education, self-empowerment strategies, vocational training, internships, conferences, and international performances, as well as the constraints or benefits of globalization that have shifted the ideological focus of many of these resistance movements since they first emerged 40 years ago. In sum, the central objective is to translate the masks of ideology, the mediations of pragmatism, and the manifestations of duplicity and co-optation into the primary ideology of black pride and dignity. This encompassing study synergizes the contradictions as well as the achievements of a resistant yet shifting transnational cultural organization. In serving as the insider-outsider intellectual bridge between the organization and a cultural-political entity as well as integrating the voices of the practitioners and detractors alike, this book sets out to be holistic in its collateral dependence on programmatic interviews and questionnaires in order to have a balanced perspective on complex organizational dynamics.

In the last four decades, *Ilê Aiyê* has represented one of the most influential cultural and political institutions in Salvador. Despite its historical significance as a cultural voice of a marginalized and repressed population, its achievements are yet to be given adequate visibility and dissemination. The acclaimed *Olodum* group, which seems to have become even more globalized and popularized, was indeed an offshoot of *Ilê Aiyê*. In essence, *Ilê Aiyê* has set a cultural, educational, and political agenda but has yet to be given due recognition for its contributions to the empowerment of its local citizenry despite challenges, contradictions, and what

may best be characterized as “growing pains” of a local and ideological organization that needs to confront the exigencies of modernity and globalization. Conceived as a micro-industry with a cultural and political agenda, the study theorizes on the ramifications of transitioning from a localized ideological organization to a global cultural phenomenon in terms of negotiation of ideals and ideologies in relation to the pragmatism of market forces that shape or even subvert those primordial ideological penchants. The result of such forces is a dislocating quagmire in which physical growth and the emergence of an enterprise ultimately become the obstacles to the original ideological agenda that is now eroding and struggling for survival within an inevitable business space, a global tourism industrial complex, and a competitive and corruption-inclined political environment. Through systematic objectives, this book argues that Ilê Aiyê is currently stuck in a quagmire of ideology, tradition, religiosity, and economic constraints. This mix of antiestablishment posture and rebelliousness combines to delineate its limitations in accomplishing its set political agenda despite investments in culture, education, and social mobilization. Some of these research objectives include: (1) to historicize Ilê Aiyê from its emergence as an offshoot of the MNU to a global cultural phenomenon; (2) to examine the many levels and aspects of the organization that amount to a complex microcultural industry; (3) to identify those internal forces responsible for the day-to-day running of the organization and for serving as the “archival memory” of the organization; (4) to examine the “executive” framework as a window into the shifting dynamics in ideology, globalization, and pragmatism; (5) to examine the gender dynamics of the organization to identify shortcomings concerning gender roles and stereotypes; (6) to analyze the sacrifices and efforts of the organization in order to build a formidable cultural entity; and finally, (7) to theorize the exigencies of modernity and globalization within an ideological entity that is faced with the limitations of racial exclusion and conflictual economic arrangement with the state.

My multivalent methodology includes a review of existing scholarship, complemented by a critical assessment of the organization through a series of interviews with the major players, actors, performers, and community nonactors, as well as in light of my own observations in the course of 33 years as an insider-outsider participant. A research questionnaire was generated to further quantify the responses of past and present members, affiliates, and those critics who have, may someday have, or have had any apprehensions about the organization, its approaches, and limitations. Authentic archival materials documenting the memory of the organization were acquired through multiple sources such as the organization itself, media entities such as *Correio da Bahia*, *TVE* (Bahian Educational

Television), and Bahiatursa (Bahian Tourism Agency). Examples of these authentic materials include the symbol-festooned textiles, the song lyrics of varied live and audiovisual performances, as well as daily interactions with members and employees. In order to properly situate the organization in relation to other Brazilian cultural institutions, I paraded in Ilê Aiyê Carnival for many years in order to properly formulate an “Ilê Aiyê Paradigm.” In addition to recent extended field studies (2008–2014) and participation during the Carnival festivities in February or March, drafts of some chapters were actually written on site to ensure that analytic precision was maintained, especially in cases of programmatic oral interviews and personal observations as the ethnographical basis for critical analysis.

### DEFINING CONCEPTS

A number of key terms such as modernity, tradition, globalization, agency, cultural transnationalism, African diaspora, hegemony, race, blackness, ethnicity, Africanity/Afro-Bahianness, ancestrality, performance, and social theory intersect in the analytical construction of an Ilê Aiyê Carnival narrative; these terms need to be contextually defined. These definitions do not claim to be exhaustive, as specificities may vary in different contexts. However, they do allow for a working engagement of how Ilê Aiyê has evolved from a local informal organization to a corporate transnational cultural phenomenon.

*Modernity.* I deploy “modernity” as the crossroads of history, novelty, and spirituality in the melting pot of cultures that is Salvador, Bahia. As the first Brazilian capital, Salvador’s streets reflect imperial times, especially in major cultural centers such as Pelourinho in the Cidade Alta (upper city) and Cidade Baixa (lower city) which are connected by the Lacerda Elevator where historical buildings, churches, and museums are concentrated in small streets and squares to the delight of the curious researcher. The urban centers are full of history and are yet transformed by modern business structures such as the explosion of mega shopping centers springing up all over the city. In the specific context of Ilê Aiyê, located in the historical community of Liberdade, modernity is blurred by tradition as the organization fuses African history, cultural motifs, and music into its major products: Carnival and Afro-Brazilian culture.

The Afro-Brazilian body is at the center of this negotiation of modernity, tradition, and commerce in what is considered the third-largest Brazilian urban center. In this embodied production site of culture and meaning, Ilê Aiyê’s modernity is visible in its ultra-modern business space in Curuzu-Liberdade where rehearsals and paid performances take place. As it embodies the ethnographic portrait of the city and its

contradictions along racial lines, the Ilê Aiyê body, as represented by its members, moves through the urban space performing Africa-derived culture through musical production and dance, dressing in colorful and vibrant textiles, and teaching African values, while inviting other races (primarily white) into a dialogue about what constitutes knowledge and the reconstruction of knowledge such as the definition of beauty and power. In this contested and blurred terrain between modernity and tradition, Ilê Aiyê negotiates a neutralization of racial hierarchies by privileging blackness while inviting whiteness into appreciating its own subjective discourse of what appears to be undifferentiated modernity due to a constant renewal of tradition.

*Tradition.* Merriam-Webster defines tradition as “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom) that relates to the past that is commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable since it has been handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another without written instruction, and thus represents cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions.” In the specific context of Ilê Aiyê, tradition is not as amorphous as culture in the larger societal sense, for the group has set out its own coded belief system and mode of behavior that is simultaneously conditioned within Afro-Brazilian spiritual practice (Candomblé), which may not be apparent on the surface but is engrained with symbolic meaning and special significance in terms of ties with the African past. Since Ilê Aiyê was founded on the premises of an Afro-Brazilian temple, named Ilê Axé Jitolu, which belonged to the founder’s mother, the creation of the profane within the sacred carries an element of unspoken intersection in which the solemnly religious blends into the festive—where the entire Carnival performance is imbued with a reenactment of ritualistic moves that are reminiscent of what obtains in the actual religious ceremonies of Candomblé. Though the organization denies consciously transposing religious rites onto the streets, Ilê Aiyê incorporates tradition through dance moves and integrative *orikis* (praise-songs) of the *Orixás* (Afro-Brazilian deities) into its music, thus echoing the homage paid to the different Afro-Brazilian gods and goddesses—even if modified to have the effect of the popularization of the sacred, so that the uninitiated can participate freely in a new invention of the “creation of the world” as captured in its name: Ilê Aiyê (House of the World). Tradition is thus codified in the multicolored Africa-derived costumes (modeled after the Candomblé robes); in the popular songs that celebrate Afro-Brazilian deities, heroes, heroines, and motherhood; in the value system inculcated in the children about respect for elders; and in the celebration of Africa’s historical past and

present. Even when operating in a modern and urban setting, Ilê Aiyê inadvertently reenacts millennia-old tradition on stage in the subtle yet powerfully choreographed interaction between African ancestors and their living children within the African diaspora.

*Agency.* By agency, I refer to Ilê Aiyê as a sociotransformative structure in the sense that it defies the odds against a racist society in order to effect political change through the apparatus of Africa-infused cultural performance. The book engages expansive primary research materials comprised of extensive interviews with leaders and members of the organizations studied, the critical analyses of documents of these organizations, and my own observations over many years of interacting with them. In this work, I lay out the civic responsibilities and significance of Ilê Aiyê within the larger framework of Brazilian racial democracy such as through engagement with educational commitment, active civic participation, and collective social and political action, as well as through economic enterprise. Very few scholars these days take the time to embed themselves into the environment and community they study. I have known the Ilê Aiyê organization for almost four decades; I have developed confidence and trust with them; I have therefore gained a unique access that may not be available to the lay researcher. This simultaneous closeness to and critical distance from the organization allow me to see and analyze how differently they operate and relate with the state. As civic and cultural actors, the leaders and members of Ilê Aiyê have creatively engaged state agencies and business institutions, while striving to retain their autonomy and set important political and cultural agendas that empower their local constituencies. As a result, my idea of agency here is not linear at all; it is dialectical and complex. By experiencing the organization internally and externally, conducting interviews with the entire organizational structure and beyond, I have come to terms with the notion that agency in Ilê Aiyê is adaptive and shifting. This is the best scholarly approach to engaging this formidable organization.

*Cultural Transnationalism.* In the frame of how Ilê Aiyê engages other cultural institutions outside of Brazil, transnationalism implies moving across and beyond the nation-state and in the course of that movement, bringing about a change of perception within the local as well as the global space. Cultural transnationalism as deployed in narrating the Ilê Aiyê story refers to how the organization markets Afro-Brazilian culture beyond the confines of Brazil, while in the process, strategically empowering its local organization as a transgressive agency that indicts Brazilian racism through the showcasing of vibrant Afro-Brazilian history on principal stages of big cities such as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Paris. The

search for cultural interconnectedness with other countries where black populations or Brazilians in general are thriving is a pan-African value-added incentive for Ilê Aiyê when it honors invitations from abroad. However, these linkages are not without reciprocal economic gain in that the organization will not perform for free or merely for the sake of political activism or solidarity. Rather, intersections of labor, capital, and culture coalesce in what may be considered a strategic cultural partnership with well-defined economic return. While the inviting nation is often at an advantage in terms of power relations and economic control, Ilê Aiyê balances this apparent “disadvantage” by setting certain conditions such as playing its own music exclusively, negotiating the minimum number of participants in the band that will travel, stipulating the number of directors to accompany the performing group, and insisting on a minimum compensation per performance. In this regard, Ilê Aiyê pushes for the promotion of its ideological ideals such as the struggle against racism as well as the defense of human rights in the broader sense, while at the same time using such transnational opportunities to communicate back to Brazil about its cultural significance and political impact beyond the country. Despite the limitations of a transnational analysis, it is rewarding to mentally process similarities and differences in transnational cultural relations, especially when one organization invites another to share its dynamic values across space and time—thus bringing about an expansion of social networks beyond the nation-state.

*Globalization.* When it comes to globalization, Appadurai observes in *Modernity at Large* (18–19) that

Globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even localizing process. The genealogy of cultural forms is about their circulation across regions. The history of these forms is about their ongoing domestication into local practice. What does need to be recognized is that locality itself is a historical product and that the histories through which localities emerge are eventually subject to the dynamics of the global.

As the movement of capital, goods, and people intensifies, closer ties with distant locations result in a complex dissemination and consumption of ideas while at the same time the interpenetration of these linkages brings about unspoken risks as interlinked political organizations can threaten the well-being of the rest of the world, as is now the case with global terrorism. In the context of Ilê Aiyê, global connections and interactions are indeed empowering even when the organization wishes it could be better recognized locally than abroad. As an unofficial cultural representative of Brazil all over the world, Ilê Aiyê does not market the

problematic racial democracy mythology that Brazil projects to the rest of the world. Rather, it argues that Brazil is still a racist country that forces it to struggle to carve a niche for itself within an elusive “multicultural” landscape in which the Afro-Brazilian population remains socioeconomically and politically marginalized. Ilê Aiyê does not pretend to be part of the global infrastructure yet, but takes advantage of every opportunity to partake of the emerging dividends underlying formal and informal institutional arrangements that it is still not yet equipped to negotiate. At the very best, it is a local Afro-Brazilian cultural organization that has become globalized but still lacks the economic infrastructure to sustain that desirable goal even after 40 years of existence.

In the broader sense, “globalization” as deployed in this book refers to the changing proximity of human societies as they become less distant due to invention of airplanes, cheap telephone service, email, computers, instant capital flows, and trade across national borders. Ideas, people, cultures, finances, and products are moving more freely at the global level. While this trend is welcomed by academics, politicians, and multinational corporations, it is questioned by billions of the world’s marginalized populations who worry that globalization threatens traditional ways of life and the livelihoods of indigenous cultures. I understand Ilê Aiyê in the context of globalization as a strategic partnership with world cultures that embrace its ideals as it represents an oppressed group that struggles for racial equality and political power. In this sense, Ilê Aiyê inadvertently finds itself in fact in the middle of the benefits of globalization and the need for an alternative path of ensuring global social justice. Though Brazil suffered economic instability, high inflation, and social inequalities in the 1970s and 1980s, the promising economic reforms of the 1990s have yielded significant dividends but have not translated into reduced poverty. It is in the context of the governmental social policies that have simultaneously stabilized the economy and reduced poverty levels that Ilê Aiyê must be understood. On the one hand, Ilê Aiyê has been a beneficiary of globalization in the sense that it has received substantial funding from national and multinational corporations such as Petrobras and the Ford Foundation. On the other hand, it has received invitations to perform in major world capitals and has thus gotten greater visibility for its mission of antiracism and economic sustainability. Although Brazil is experiencing a growing middle class and some reduction in social inequality such as income mobility, these benefits are not trickling down to the general membership of Ilê Aiyê but seem to be more visible at the executive level. Globalization for Ilê Aiyê is thus a double-edged phenomenon: financially beneficial for some of the leaders but offering only cultural rewards to the followers or ordinary members.

*African Diaspora.* The African diaspora is the aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade in which Africans were forcibly removed from their home continent. With the abolition of slavery, African descendants in Brazil (and elsewhere) influenced most aspects of everyday life, especially in the areas of culture and religion. Carnival is one such cultural expression, which has merged with the material and the symbolic in the negotiation of identities. The African Union considers the African diaspora as people of African origin living outside of the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality, and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the union. I discuss Ilê Aiyê as a struggling continuum of a large community of African-origin people in Brazil as it seeks to locate itself not only in Brazil but also in Africa. Through underlying African religious influence, members of Ilê Aiyê are attached to the idea of Africa as a continent of origin even as they struggle to make sense of their marginalized realities in the new (that is, nonancestral) location. Ilê Aiyê is a part of the African diaspora in the sense that although concrete physical connections to the African land of origin were increasingly lost over many generations, symbolic ties through cultural expressions are retained and celebrated. Ilê Aiyê sees culture as political, hence its appropriation of Carnival as a stage for the negotiation of power and racial equality.

*Hegemony.* In its struggle against racism, Ilê Aiyê must contend with the social, cultural, ideological, and economic influence exerted by the hegemonic group. By “hegemony” in the Brazilian context, I refer to the white, political, and market forces that control the distribution and allocation of scarce resources. After its emergence in the 1970s during the Brazilian military dictatorship, not only did its activities depend on the limited personal resources of its members and those of a few white sponsors, but its racialized ideology of maintaining only dark-skinned Brazilians as members further created (and continues to fuel) an antagonism that erodes the very power it is searching for, especially in tandem with the local sponsoring government. As an organization invested in social justice struggles, Ilê Aiyê finds itself competing with hegemonic forces through its counterhegemonic projects as it defines and redefines itself within changing political-economic realities of the mythic racial democracy and the globalizing agenda of the tourist industry, which then places the group’s objectives in dialectical tension with the state.

*Race, Blackness, and Others.* Further complicating Ilê Aiyê’s political position in relation to the state are the categories of *race*, *blackness*, *ethnicity*, *ancestrality*, and *Africanity/Afro-Bahianness*, which coalesce in the problematic reinvention of Africa in Bahia, as the organization must negotiate categories as they affect the racial Other. Despite the



dangers of raciological thought, the discussion of “race” is inevitable as Ilê Aiyê subscribes to the notion of a black race so far as it is differentiated from the white race even when its ethnicity is appropriately defined as emerging from the Yoruba—as based on the Oriṣa tradition of the Candomblé houses within which it was founded. Whether black, ethnic, ancestral, African, or Afro-Bahian, the unifying stratum of identity lies in the organization’s relationship with the rest of “white” Brazil as it perceives its own oppressed Other that must strive for racial equality and economic empowerment. It is against this complex background that performance and social theory take a significant meaning, for it is through performance that Ilê Aiyê anchors its social discourse.

In the social performance order of things, Ilê Aiyê ritualistically integrates Bakhtin’s four categories (free interaction, eccentric behavior, carnivalistic misalliances, and the sacrilegious) while at the same time showcasing black race as a critical agency of the subversion of and negotiation with the white establishment. Ilê Aiyê Carnival is not only racially conscious, it heightens social conflicts by excluding the very establishment that invests in its performance in the name of cultural tourism. Ilê Aiyê does not pretend to be tolerant of other races; instead, its ideological praxis of 100 percent blackness in itself embodies an affront to the establishment which it parodies through symbolic logic of reversal. In fusing the terrains of the sacred, the profane, and the performative with the political, the group succeeds in indicting racism by giving the racist society a dose of its own medicine in a reversed ideological context that the Carnival unsuspectingly permits.

## SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1, “Carnival in Africa and Its Diaspora,” lays out the contextual and theoretical parameters within which to interrogate the significance and the challenges of Ilê Aiyê as a cultural agency within a mythical racial democracy. Engaging rituals of Carnival, the interactive myths of celebration and renewal, and the complex dynamics of inclusive exclusion that the event represents for marginalized populations, the chapter theorizes on the question of how this singular event serves as a duality of “masking” and “negotiation of power” for both the oppressed and the oppressor in literature and culture. Beyond this panoramic foreground regarding origins and transformations, the chapter examines the representation(s) of Carnival in literature and popular culture from the viewpoints of performance and cultural theory. In this context, I also survey the manifestations of Carnival globally and in the African diaspora. For many of these transatlantic cultural entities, Afro-Atlantic Carnivals fill varied lacunae

in many layers of performative, economical, and political terrains. While performative showcasing of cultural visibility is more pronounced, the notion of the Carnival setting as an alternative space of blackness and even race mixture offers a window into the complex dynamics of Brazilian racial relations as well as the globalizing impact of Carnival as a resource and strategy for self-definition. On such a stage of tensions and negotiations, two phenomena distinguish themselves as inseparable, namely the intricate connections between sacred rituals and popular culture.

Chapter 2, “Emergence of an Afro-Carnival Agency,” returns to the historical context of the emergence of Ilê Aiyê as a founding Carnival group in Salvador. As David Covin points out in *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil* (2006), “Carnival, like everything else, is racialized” (57). With this in view, the chapter focuses on the fundamental struggles of the movement, which led to the formation of groups such as Ilê Aiyê as an offshoot of the MNU’s ideological paradigm of consciousness raising in the seventies. In the pragmatic sense, Ilê Aiyê has indeed gone beyond the tenets of the MNU, for in addition to raising consciousness, it also encourages its members to take professional courses and gain employment in the labor market. The centrality of ideology and black pride does remain a constant in the organization’s search for a strategic balance between culture and politics. The emergence of Ilê Aiyê as a cultural and political enterprise is a manifestation of the triumph of the human spirit in the sense that Ilê Aiyê believed in its goals from the very beginning despite so many hindrances from the larger competing interests of mainstream media and alienating governmental structures that saw the group’s ideals as a form of “reverse discrimination.” In effect, Ilê Aiyê’s position to maintain its organization as 100 percent black (i.e., for blacks only) stems from a reaction to the colonial notion that blacks could not organize themselves and needed whites to help them even during the period of slavery. In a reversal of the strategy of demeaning blacks, Ilê Aiyê takes the position that it will not only organize itself, but it will also exclude whites from being directly involved and from parading with its organization.

Chapter 3, “Mãe Hilda: Matriarchy, Candomblé, and Ilê Aiyê,” engages the connections between the matriarchal position of Mãe Hilda and the spiritual affinities of the organization. From colorful textiles to the recent homages paid by African countries and leaders as well as the African diaspora, Mãe Hilda symbolizes Acotirene of the Quilombo (Brazilian Maroon settlements in seventeenth-century Brazil) in the sense that she provides spiritual guidance and blesses the organization as it sets out each year to parade in Bahian Carnival. In this synergetic and paradigmatic enactment of motherhood and spirituality, Mãe Hilda fortifies the organization spiritually while the same grows it both structurally

and politically. In addition, this chapter examines the place of pedagogy in the larger Ilê Aiyê organization. It is noteworthy that the school and library within the organization are named after Mãe Hilda, the association president's mother in whose Candomblé temple, Ilê Axé Jitolu, Ilê Aiyê was founded. In assessing this Carnival group, I analyze the social and ideological initiatives that were then dreams but are now realities in the new headquarters situated in the same Curuzu location. Focusing on the significance of the matriarch and guardian spirit, the chapter on Mãe Hilda is a mini-biography of the organization's spiritual leader. It investigates her beginnings, her leadership in the Candomblé house, and her overall presence within Ilê Aiyê's activities.

Chapter 4, "Aesthetics of Ilê Aiyê's African(ized) Carnival Costumes," sets out to examine the exteriorization of beauty through the prism of the textiles used in the group's multiple performances, especially during the Carnival's Black Beauty pageant. This chapter exposes the dynamic process of selecting the Carnival Queen while allowing the forum to serve as a setting that promotes African culture. It also covers the overlap between the Africanized textiles and the pageantry in preparation for the annual Carnival. The focus is on the significance of the pageantry as a strategic location for showcasing Afro-Brazilian culture. Selectively laying out the many textiles as case studies over a period of almost 40 years, the chapter traces the different stages of "experimentation," "consolidation," and "sophistication," and seeks to understand the complexities of black pride in the New World. Each creative fabric for a given year is analyzed to uncover the significance of images, symbolism, and motifs inscribed within the aesthetic creation of Ilê Aiyê.

Chapter 5, "Masquerades of Afro-Femininity, Beauty and Politics," studies the annual Black Beauty pageant in which the Ebony Goddess is selected to lead the Carnival of that year. An embodiment of all the ideological missions of Ilê Aiyê in terms of the negation of stereotypical images of the black woman, and, by extension, Brazilian blacks in general, the event culminates in a spectacular show of black beauty that is the pride of the entire community of Bahia. Contesting the prevailing Europeanized standards of beauty that are couched in whiteness, blondeness, and slimness, the contest is a counternarrative of black beauty from the viewpoint of blacks themselves. The Ebony Goddess embodies Africa-centered notions of beauty by encouraging a display of intelligence, adornment with richly textured Africa-derived fabric, and dancing prowess accompanied by African rhythms. Named "Night of Black Beauty" or *Noite da Beleza Negra*, this event attracts many celebrities and government representatives from all over Salvador and even nationwide, such as the state governor of Bahia, the mayor of Salvador,

ministers of culture, dance groups, bands, and singers, among others. The chapter gives a different meaning to the politics of beauty in a seemingly nonpolitical setting such as the preparations for Carnival.

Chapter 6, “Vovô: The Man, His Vision, His Legacy,” serves as a mini-biography of the founder and president of Ilê Aiyê, while chronicling his struggles and agitations to create a local and international ideological organization. His accomplishments include the development and empowerment of the community through such strategies as vocational education and professionalization. In essence, the various professional schools of drumming, hair plaiting, and textile making, among others, represent a kind of community outreach and self-development, as graduates then set up boutiques and beauty salons, and join cultural organizations in order to apply the training they received at the Ilê Aiyê professional school. Likewise, individual development is encouraged, despite the challenges of the hegemonic setting in which whites are more privileged or better prepared for social mobility. By this suggestion, the chapter examines comparatively the solo artists who have sung and performed for Ilê Aiyê before gaining relative stardom. While in some cases, these “stars” were already established, such as Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, others like Daniela Mercury and Gerônimo are a few of the cultural performers whose stardom may have been enhanced by association with Ilê Aiyê at some point in their careers.

Chapter 7, “Politics of Afro-Carnival Music,” analyzes the musical production of Ilê Aiyê as contained in its album releases to date: *Canto Negro I*, *Canto Negro II*, *Canto Negro III*, *Ilê Aiyê: 25 Anos*, and *Ilê Aiyê 2010*. Drawing upon James Scott’s theory of onstage/offstage discourses (public/hidden transcript) in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, this chapter analyzes Ilê Aiyê from the viewpoints of playfulness, seriousness, spirituality, and political ideology. Each musical production is vetted during the Black Music Festival, in which songwriters and musicians compete for prizes, after which their selections are practiced for Carnival and commercial recording. Many of the musical cuts have become iconic among followers to the point that their lyrics are memorized. From “Que Bloco É Esse?” (What Carnival group is that?), “Deusa do Ébano” (Ebony Goddess), “Negrume da Noite” (Black Darkness), “O Mais Belo dos Belos” (The Most Beautiful of the Beautiful), “Negrice Cristal” (Crystal Blackness), to “Matriarca do Curuzu” (Curuzu Matriarch), each cut translates a context and a message that interact on the level of black pride, celebration, and consciousness raising. Moreover, the contributions of musical superstars such as Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Carlinhos Brown, Martinho da Vila, and Daniela Mercury are analyzed in terms of solidarity with Ilê Aiyê and efforts toward its visibility and recognition.

Chapter 8, “(Un)masking the Afro-Carnival Organization,” serves as a deconstructive analysis of an organization that is shrouded in secrecy. Through a careful characterization of a microcultural enterprise, some conclusions are reached: (1) the top management is the most empowered; (2) the middle management employees represent a group of ambivalent critics and supporters; (3) the teachers are not functioning to their full potential due to insufficient training and professionalization; (4) the general workers are “yes-people” as they are not in a position to see things critically; (5) the community, depending on whom one interviews, is both disgruntled and supportive; and (6) the organization has no internal mechanism of self-reflection toward improvement, while transient researchers are not at liberty to share their conclusions since most of their findings will be disseminated in a language other than Portuguese. Empowerment entails participation and fulfillment within the organization, but there is no evidence of such satisfaction of the basic needs of membership. Ilê Aiyê celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2014; this midlife stage is an appropriate moment to assess its contradictions and ambiguities given its need to constantly negotiate with the establishment it accuses of racism. This chapter not only invokes the need to be pragmatic and realistic about co-optation, but it also surmises that ideological compromise with the state will be inevitable in the years ahead.

In this critical yet celebratory study, Ilê Aiyê emerges as one of the major cultural organizations in Brazil that resist the destruction of blackness and African ancestry even as it is compelled to negotiate with the same governmental structure that represents white supremacy in the blackest region of the country. Its fortieth anniversary signals its permanent legacy as a powerful entity to be reckoned with in the struggle for improved racial relations as well as the quest for black political power. In formulating some preliminary conclusions, this book argues that Ilê Aiyê is suffering from pull-push dynamics between global market forces, governmental patronage, and local ideological penchants that continue to challenge its significance and future economic survival. Despite the seeming contradictions between the initial ideological orientation and the need to be part of global market forces, Ilê Aiyê stands as a model of a successful grassroots cultural organization that has made a significant impact in the community and in Brazil as a whole. While the educational sector remains one of its more visible accomplishments, it also figures as one of the major players in Brazilian cultural politics.

## Carnival in Africa and Its Diaspora

This chapter interrogates the relationship between the rituals of Carnival, the interactive myths of celebration and renewal, and the complex dynamics of inclusive exclusion that the event represents for Afro-Brazilian marginalized populations as well as for descendants of Africans on the world stage. In theorizing and mapping how this singular event serves the dual purpose of “masking” and “negotiation of power”<sup>1</sup> for both the oppressed and the oppressor, I examine the representation(s) of Carnival from the viewpoints of performance and cultural theory. Some of the questions raised include:

- What are the paradigmatic discourses on Carnival in Brazil and in the African diaspora?
- To what extent is Carnival an all-inclusive phenomenon where everyone participates without regard to social hierarchies and racial discrimination? Is it really possible to “neutralize” social hierarchies in a patriarchal space in which blackness is still the marginalized Other?
- What are the main pretexts and realities of performing and engaging Carnival in a space that is economically and structurally controlled by hegemonic forces?
- In laying out the main arguments for this book, what are the popular and epistemological orientations that shape Carnival as a “collective” performance in which participants can propagate their own individuality through political masking?
- Is there an absolute conviction on the possibility of an alternative or paradigmatic shift that evokes both relative nostalgia for Africa and the disillusionment of Afro-descendants in the enigmatic Brazilian mosaic?
- How is the Carnival space redefined after the provisional cultural performance? Such are the questions that define *Ilê Aiyê* as it