

Introduction

Relocating the Sacred

In 1982, I was one of seven privileged Nigerian students from the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) who participated in the study abroad program at the University of São Paulo, Brazil. Sometime in late November of the same year, I was performing my customary sociocultural immersion by strolling through the city of São Paulo. I ran into an older Afro-Brazilian man who was in town for one of those annual Afro-Brazilian congresses that took place to commemorate the death of Zumbi dos Palmares, the Afro-Brazilian leader who was killed by the Portuguese colonial invaders of the Palmares maroon settlement (*Quilombo dos Palmares*) on November 20, 1695. After some fraternal greetings, Antônio Carlos dos Santos, an iconic personality who is popularly known in Salvador and within the Black movement as “Vovô,” gave me his business card and invited me to visit Bahia. I noticed that the name of his carnival organization, Ilê Aiyê (House of the world), was written in Yoruba, my native language.¹ When the semester ended, I made a trip to Bahia that transformed my life spiritually, culturally, and professionally. The overwhelming two-week research sojourn felt like two years. In the last twenty years, I have since returned to Bahia to uncover more of the cultural convergences and divergences between Africa and Brazil.

While in Bahia, I decoded the many striking influences of Yoruba religion, culture, and language in Brazil. Beyond the enchanting use of Yoruba words in building names, such as the “Edifício Ogum” (Ogun building), “Oxumare Center” (mini-shopping center called “Rainbow”), and the “Casa de Yemanjá” (Yemoja house), as well as in popular songs

by Gerônimo, I noticed that the spirit of the Osun goddess reigns over the entire city (“É d’Oxum” [Belongs to Osun]) and the traditional Yoruba bean cake (*akara*) is popularly sold on the streets as acarajé. I soon came to learn that Yoruba orisa influenced the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé, as well as the many Afro-Brazilian carnival groups, such as Ilê Aiyê, Olodum (Celebrant), Orunmila (Father of divination), Okambi (Progenitor or child of Okan), Araketu (People of Ketu), Badauê (Power of unity), and Filhos de Gandhi (Children of Gandhi), among others.² The influence of Yoruba was everywhere.

My culture shock reached an ecstatic crescendo in Bahia when I visited Ilê Axé Opo Afonja, one of the oldest Afro-Brazilian temples. I was there to conduct an ethnographic interview about Afro-Brazilian carnival. To my surprise, my scheduled research participant was not only an active member of one of the Afro-Bahian carnival organizations in which I was interested, but he was also an initiate of the sacred temple I had visited. What was to be a secular encounter became inadvertently religious. Three decades since that defining encounter, I no longer remember the name of my interviewee. Yet, two things occurred during that fortuitous interview that I have been reflecting on for many years. First, while I was expecting him to speak Portuguese, he offered me coffee in Yoruba: “Omo Oxum, se wa mu omi dudu?” (Child of Osun [Nigerian] would you care for a cup of coffee?). I was not only shocked but started perspiring uncontrollably. I was speaking Portuguese, and my Brazilian interviewee was responding in a millennial Yoruba liturgic language that contemporary Yoruba speakers like me no longer use. By calling me “Omo Oxum,” he was identifying me as both a devotee of Osun, a Nigerian goddess, and as a Nigerian, because Osun is one of the most well-known rivers in Nigeria. He then invited me to visit the houses of many different orisas (deities), including Osun (Goddess of sweet rivers and fertility), Yemoja (Sea goddess or mermaid), Sango (God of thunder), Ogun (God of iron and justice), Oya (Goddess of the wind), Obatala (God of divination), and Esu (God of the crossroads).

My Afro-Brazilian host could not help but notice my trepidation. I was not comfortable entering the sacred houses that had been opened for me, even as a Yoruba, a Nigerian, and an African. Nor did I offer the expected verbal veneration (*orikis*) to these deities. As I swiftly removed myself from the sacred spaces and altars, I explained that I was not yet initiated into the secrets of Yoruba religiosity and could not perform sacred rituals reserved for the elders. But this was only partially

true. In actuality, I was dealing with the impact of the British colonial mentality that had almost “erased” my Yoruba consciousness and pride. In other words, it took my research visit to Brazil, and Bahia especially, to rediscover the richness of my Yoruba identity and to rid myself of the remaining relics of the colonial brainwashing that had forced many of us to abandon our Yoruba deities (orisas, or orixás in Brazil) and thereafter embrace Christianity as colonized Africans under the tutelage of imposed foreign religions. Even after independence, many Africans still suffer from the ravages of European coloniality. Through religious syncretism, Brazil has preserved African religious culture for many centuries, despite the hardships and horrors of enslavement. It is against this background that I can relate to Brazil as a site where sacred Yoruba traditions have been relocated through the Middle Passage.

This book brings a critical perspective to the relocation of Yoruba sacred practices in the diaspora and in so doing challenges the racial democracy myth in Brazil. Why do these African cultural practices persist amidst the onslaught of globalization? Within a context of ongoing racial discrimination and demonization of Blackness, what roles exist for identifiable religious-cum-sacred rituals? My claim is that the tension between the theory of racial democracy and the practice of white supremacy in Brazil opens the space for syncretism of cultures, including African sacred practices. Turning to three location(s) of culture—to borrow from Homi Bhabha—that is, ritual altars, literature, and carnival, I argue that the syncretism of African sacred practices offers a technology for grappling with enduring racisms, provides a strategy of resistance against white hegemonic power, and serves as a tool in the ongoing efforts toward decolonization.

By the sacred, I am referring to all Yoruba religious rites that have blended into Brazilian popular culture over the years through syncretism. In my argument, relocation operates at two main levels. At the diasporic level, it relates to the Atlantic crossing of the Middle Passage, while, at the cultural level, it informs how the sacred has become hybridized, popularized, and commercialized as a strategy of religious negotiation, political resistance, and economic survival. By examining relocation as it relates to sacred rites of African religious culture in Brazil, this study argues that “racial democracy” in Brazil is an inherently contradictory idea. That is because racial democracy is premised on celebrating the hybridization of African divinities in Brazilian popular and expressive cultures while also denying the collateral existence of racial discrimination, which is temporarily camouflaged by miscegenetic rituals and

festive performances. Studies on religious syncretism and hybridized festivals in Brazil coalesce on the primacy of the popularization of the sacred.³ While it is facile to study these expressive cultures separately, comparative studies of the popularization of the sacred must also grapple with the fact that cultural producers either deny the presence of the sacred in their production or strategically use symbologies to hide the more obvious examples. In either case, an absent presence (racism) shapes cultural expressions under threat of limited funding opportunities, which compel producers to succumb to dominant political pressures and manipulative sponsorships. In other words, hybridizations serve as a safety valve to launch resistance or negotiations without upsetting the racist status quo. Many of these strategies are characterized by the acceptance of co-optation as an inevitable compromise for pursuing political ideas, which are ultimately traded for cultural symbologies in the name of social survival.

Relocating the Sacred: African Divinities and Brazilian Cultural Hybridities is divided into three parts, each of which maps the location of the sacred: the first in Afro-Brazilian ritual altars, the second in literature, and the third in carnival culture. This study argues that, whether in literature or hybrid cultural manifestations, such as the carnival or musical performances, the sacred emerges in intricate alternative spaces as the oppressive memory of slavery and racial discrimination. In the shadow of colonialism and enslavement, Africanism ceases to be a matter of the clear demarcation of authentic identity. Instead, given the reality of miscegenation and identity crisis in Brazil, Africanism must necessarily be thought of as plural.

Theorizing Relocation of the Sacred

To understand the relocation of the sacred, it is imperative to first appreciate what constitutes a sacred space. In the Afro-Brazilian context, relocation is doubly manifest as both the forcible removal from Africa and the affirmation of Afro-spiritual identity through negotiations with hybridity, cultural identity, and self-preservation.⁴ Claudia Moser and Cecilia Feldman (2014) argue that the location in which rituals are enacted foundationally impacts ritual practices themselves. They suggest that “a sacred space does not exist *a priori* but is the outcome of actions, intentions, and recollections—it is the result of past and

present interactions among humans, material implements, architecture, and landscape.”⁵ While there is bound to be disagreements about what constitutes “authenticity” once a sacred or ritualized action is relocated, we can at least agree that religious practices are conditioned by local social contexts that define their meanings and politics depending on the aspirations of their devotees over many years of adaptations and shifting continuities. For example, in his case study of Hinduism, Vijay Agnew (2005) insists that the dynamic acculturation to new social contexts following dislocation gives flavor to the new diasporic culture. He argues that rituals evolve, and their cultural manifestations are not fixed—“change resists petrification and allows the religion to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of its devotees over time.”⁶ In other words, the practice of Hinduism in the diaspora is mediated by the reality of race and racism. Likewise, the relocation of Yoruba religion and its adaptation into Candomblé in Brazil shares some of the same characteristics of the diasporic soul highlighted by Agnew.

Combining the religious aspects of Yoruba deities with Catholicism and some Amerindian influences, Candomblé evolved in Brazil between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries and fully emerged with the founding of the first *terreiro* (temple) in the nineteenth century. Understood by its Brazilian devotees as the veneration of the orixás (Yoruba deities), Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religious tradition that is practiced mainly in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, but with some variations in other Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Venezuela. By syncretizing Catholic saints with Yoruba deities, Candomblé emerged as a religion of resistance against the horrors of enslavement. Practitioners sought to draw strength from their ancestral divinities, as well as from a Supreme Creator called Olodumaré. Devotees have their selected orixás, which regulate their destinies and serve as guardian protectors of their daily activities. The ceremonies include music and dance, through which some devotees are possessed by the descending deities. Like African religious traditions, Candomblé ceremonies may also include offerings of gifts and animal sacrifices. Rachel Harding (2000) theorizes that Candomblé has been an alternative space of citizenship and identity for Afro-Brazilians, and the circle dance within Candomblé ceremonies serves to create “new, more elastic boundaries—of community, of refuge, of transformation. . . . [T]he structures of community engendered by shared dance, especially in the circle, were prime sites for the recreation of black identity toward a pan-African emphasis in

the New World.”⁷ Through this negotiation of citizenship and identity, Afro-Brazilians deploy the relocation of the sacred from Africa to Brazil as a form of political agency toward self-transformation in spite of the lasting traumas of enslavement. Dance, drumming, ritual ceremonies, and annual festivals embody the memory of Africa through its relocation.

The Brazilian domains of the relocation of the sacred are multispatial and extensive. The Candomblé houses alone are just one of the major spaces of the sacred, and they serve as living museums for religious, memorial, archival, historical, architectural, artistic, musical, culinary, ritualistic, festive, linguistic, moral, entrepreneurial, medicinal, and social organizational contents.⁸ Given that the forced Atlantic migration and enslavement of Africans took place under traumatic circumstances, there was neither the opportunity nor the luxury for the enslaved to bring along with them any material belongings. However, through the oral traditions with which they were already familiar and in which they had been socialized in Africa, the enslaved were able to draw on the power of memory to reconstruct most of the sacred activities, which served as a way to cope with the traumas of enslavement. Through this painstaking process, the enslaved simultaneously rehumanized themselves through cultural relics and preserved themselves against the breaking of their spirits. Over the years, relocated sacred spaces that used to look rather basic in their architectural design are now quite elaborate and gigantic. The influx of renovation funds to the major Candomblé houses in Bahia and elsewhere during the tenure of Gilberto Gil as minister of culture in the new millennium permitted Afro-Brazilians to renovate and modernize old structures. Such renovations have also impacted what has become known as heritage tourism, as African Americans and other curious tourists flock to Brazil to better understand African cultural and historical resonances in South America.

In her critical excavation of Candomblé in sacred and secular spaces in Salvador, Heather Shirey (2009) provides one of the most extensive elaborations (at least since the works of Pierre Verger) of how relocation “transform[ed] the Orixás.” Succinctly covering both sacred and public (or secularly relocated) spaces, Shirey exposes a city that is engrossed with the manifestation and preservation of the sacred:

In the streets and plazas of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, representations of the *orixás*, the deities of the African-Brazilian religion of Candomblé, are visible throughout the city, Mural

paintings appear on walls and signs where they blend in with advertisements and graffiti, allowing motorists to contemplate the entire pantheon of *orixás* while filling up the gas tank. A sculpture of Exú, the guardian of the crossroads and the *orixá* who oversees all forms of communication, is positioned, most appropriately, in front of the city's central post office; a painted mermaid associated with Yemanjá overlooks the sea; and on the Dique do Tororó, a large lake and recreation zone in the middle of the city, a group of *orixá* statues dances in a circle on the surface of the water.⁹

Shirey's study, combining ethnography, participant observation, and qualitative methods, was conducted between 1998 and 2002. For her study, she had the opportunity to interview some of the artists behind these visual representations of Candomblé across the city, including Tatti Moreno, who created the permanent installation of African deities on the Dique do Tororó. Her study also allowed the devotees of different Candomblé communities or nations (Nagô, Jeje, and Angola) to compare notes on the detailed differences between their forms of sacred structure, empowerment, and possession trance. In addition to analyzing the historic evolution and complexity of Candomblé through the works of Roger Bastide (2009), Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits (1958), Ruth Landes (1994), Roger Sansi (2007), Stephen Selka (2005), and Jim Wafer (1991), Shirey critiques the monumental representation of the *orixás* in the public realm for their simplicity and for homogenizing and secularizing sacred altars that are now deprived of their ritualistic practices. Perhaps even more interesting is Shirey's description of the public protest by Pentecostal churches against the official inauguration of these sacred sculptures.¹⁰ These protests signal the problematic side of the relocation of the sacred from Africa to the Western world, where Christianity still reigns supreme.

Of significant impact to the relocation thesis is a recent exhibition (and attendant catalogue) that focuses on the sacred artistry of the *orixás* in Salvador da Bahia. In *Axé Bahia: The Power of Art in Afro-Brazilian Metropolis* (2017), edited by Patrick A. Polk, Roberta Conduru, Sabrina Gledhill, and Randal Johnson, Bahia is rendered through painstakingly illustrated artistic works, as well as through analyses by a score of prominent scholars. Prominent among these analyses is the characterization of Bahia as a kind of "Black Rome," where the relics of Africa are visible

throughout the city. The monumental work documents festival cycles, such as Festa de Yemanjá (Yemoja festival) and the Lavagem do Bomfim (Washing of the Good-End Church), which culminate in the national carnival celebrations in February or March. It also describes the creative artistry of ancestrality in the production of emblems of the orixás; capoeira martial performances; the exploration of the orixás in Brazilian popular music; Black presence in Afro-Bahian carnival; the inspired and syncretic artistry of Candomblé; and the interlocking agency of art, beauty, and vital force, among others. Collectively, *Axé Bahia* demonstrates that the city of Salvador is the quintessential reservoir of African religiosity and cultural preservation in Brazil. Each essay could easily be expanded into a book of its own. In one such essay, Patrick Polk provides an analysis of a painting by Carybé. As if answering the question posed in the title of his essay—“Have You Been to Bahia?”—Polk offers a global vision of what a newcomer needs to know:

The Church of Bomfim dominates the high ground to the right. Some residents watch a capoeira match while others go about their business carrying goods to and from market. Nearby a Candomblé initiation is underway. Musicians, one playing a *berimbau* and another holding a guitar, crowd up against a contemplative Baiana sitting cross-legged on an expanse of Portuguese tile. It is also a spirit-filled domain with the Afro-Brazilian orixá Yemanjá floating just beneath its waters in mermaid form while other orixás join with Jesus and Catholic saints to hold court and battle demons in the sky above.¹¹

Polk’s overall description of the domain of the sacred is extensive and comprehensive, reflecting the major images and themes of relocation in the Afro-Brazilian experience from slavery to the present.

As Afro-Brazilian sacred artistry recuperates from its dislocation from Africa, so too do other cultural manifestations, such as music, dance, carnival, culinary arts, capoeira, medicine, literature, and cinema, use memory to relocate the sacred. Music is a powerful example—not only is it therapeutic and soothing, but it also has the emotive power to express deep feelings that may otherwise be permanently silenced due to trauma and pain. In the context of the musical veneration of the orixás, the complex dynamics of the Yoruba liturgic language (from

Nigeria, Benin, and Togo) have been diluted with Portuguese and, at times, even Kimbundu (from Angola). Within the Candomblé rituals, singing, drumming, and dancing challenge the preservation of authenticity because the songs are orally transmitted from one generation to the next rather than written down for posterity. With the advent of modern technology and efforts to record these chants or sacred songs, popular musicians as well as the Candomblé houses are beginning to document these invaluable treasures through CD and DVD recordings.¹² Relocation of the sacred in this instance takes place as a form of documentation of African sacred songs within Brazilian sacred space, as well as as a form of commercialization through popular music. Studies by José Jorge de Carvalho (1999a, 1999b, 2004), Luciano da Silva Candemil (2019), and Christopher Dunn (2017) trace the history and manifestations of Afro-Brazilian ritual music from their origins as Vissungos, Jongos, and Alabês, through to the many variations of Cantos Sangrados, Tambores de Axé, Samba, and Axé music.¹³ These studies also painstakingly analyze the social contexts and meanings of ritual music as it translates the aspirations of Afro-Brazilian communities to a wider audience. Through these recordings, supplicants venerate the orixás and request protection for their communities as well as for necessary improvements in their social life. This collaboration between the African originators of the musical culture and their Brazilian appropriators has a documentary value for the relocation of the sacred from Africa to Brazil.

Of central importance to the relocation thesis is the prominence of carnival in Brazil. After soccer, carnival is a national phenomenon and serves as a reset button for all Brazilians after a year of social struggle and racial tension. Often mixed with music, local color, extravagantly decorated floats, and historical and transnational themes, carnival is the greatest show on earth and a unique opportunity for locals and state tourist organizations alike to benefit economically from the influx of global revelers. However, contrary to the marketing of Rio carnival as the only carnival that exists, there are many carnival celebrations in Brazil, and it is worth mentioning a few: Carnaval carioca, the most extravagant and touristic celebration, held in Rio; Frevo, a very fast variation in which revelers dance with small umbrellas on the streets of Recife-Pernambuco; and Afro-Bahian carnival, the one with the most visible African presence, in which African deities are often on display in a strategic enactment of political negotiation that Christopher Dunn has termed a “stage for protest.”¹⁴ On a consistent annual basis, carnival groups (blocos afros and

afoxés), including Ilê Aiyê, Olodum, Cortejo Afro, Filhos de Gandhi, Ara Ketu, among others, draw inspiration from African religious motifs to resist and politically negotiate with a hostile and racist environment. Afro-Bahian carnival is often a strategically hybrid or masked process, one that showcases pride in African cosmologies during weeks-long festive parades. Afro-Bahian carnival serves to preserve African cultural values that were relocated during the Middle Passage. The annual ritual empowers the most Africanized and concentrated diasporic population in the Americas. The reenactment of African deities, kingdoms, kings, pharaohs, queens, heroes, heroines, and colonial rebellions captures the inherent spiritual desire of Afro-Brazilians to validate their religious traditions through pride, memory, and cultural performance.

The mixture of races, religiosities, festivals, and expressive arts serves as the driving force for the relocation and effervescence of Africa in Bahia. The Baianas (also Baianas de Acarajé), robed in the white-laced spiritual garments of Candomblé and adorned with colorful beads, turbans, and good-luck charms, suggest an image of Bahia as a land of warmth and hospitality. But beyond this symbolic representation, the Baianas are the face of religiosity and cuisine in Bahia, as they sell acarajé on street corners and invite tourists to take pictures with them for a fee. Due to their historical significance to local color as an embodiment of the merging of the sacred and the profane, the Baianas participate in religious events and festivals, such as Lavagem do Bomfim (Washing of the Lord of Good End Church), and have their own wing, called Ala das Baianas, within each school of samba during the national carnival celebrations, especially in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The relocation of the sacred comes alive in annual Bahian religious syncretic festivals in which the orixás are honored, as in the festival of the sea goddess, or Yemanjá, which corresponds to Catholic Our Lady of Conception or Virgin Mary. Similarly, Iansã, the goddess of winds and storms, is honored as Catholic Santa Bárbara during the *Festa de Santa Bárbara*. Meanwhile, Oxalá, the patron deity of the universe, is honored during the Catholic Lord of Good End festival. Of special significance is the Good Death Festival (*Festa da Boa Morte*) in the city of Cachoeira, which celebrates the ascension of Virgin Mary to heaven, the procession of which is exclusively reserved for Afro-Brazilian women who are over the age of fifty. This sampling of Africa-derived religious festivals and expressive and culinary arts that have been fully integrated within Afro-Bahian cultural identity would be incomplete without mentioning

capoeira. A mix of martial arts and dance that is now practiced all over the world, capoeira symbolizes the history of the struggle for freedom from enslavement and now transcends its Angolan rootedness to have become a manifestation of the Afro-Bahian identity.¹⁵ With its myriad manifestations of the sacred in the popular realm, Bahia remains the quintessential zone for the activation of the sacred in the daily life of Brazilians.

Affirmation of Afro-Spiritual Identities

Any discussion of the relationship between spirituality and cultural identity in Brazil is inextricably linked to questions of racial identity, especially when discussing the African influences on Brazilian heritage. While religious syncretism manifests in both sacred and popular spheres, racial mixture is even more problematic as a strategy for negotiating power, as when racial heritage was covertly masked under the guise of religious interconnectedness to preserve African cultural identity. In other words, while both frameworks (religious syncretism and racial mixture) assert sameness despite diversity, they often silence the identitarian foundations that are necessary for African cultural identity to assert its true value and pride. The efforts of Afro-Brazilian religions to deploy syncretism to survive the hardships of enslavement and to preserve African cultural values are not only strategic but also praiseworthy. The challenge remains, however, for Afro-Brazilian subjects to reconcile Euro-Brazilian and Afro-Brazilian identities. Ethnoreligious identity politics in Brazil offer a case study in how Afro-Brazilians cope with the many facets of their identity as they negotiate both the sacred and the African. Studies by Stefania Capone (2010), Stephen Selka (2007), and Vagner Gonçalves da Silva (2014) offer some insight into the complexities and contradictions of the quest for racial and ethnic identity within a problematic national and political context. While these approaches vary, whether focusing on multiple religions, a specific religion, or overlapping religious affiliations, they coalesce on the primacy of identity as a structuring motif in the configuration of belonging regardless of religious affinity. Selka, for example, unveils the underlying contradictions between Blackness and Brazilian religions and how these relationships shape what is left of political affluence (albeit an affluence that is subsumed under cultural politics). Meanwhile, Silva argues that the relationship between black cultural identity and religion

are relics of African symbolologies in Brazilian heritage. This fact is further confirmed in Capone's study, which illustrates how Candomblé remains the zone of tradition and power despite the controversial authenticity and purity of the African-derived Brazilian religion. Afro-spiritual identity subscribes to the politics of identity even when masked by popular, cultural, or festive manifestations.¹⁶

Stephen Selka's study *Religion and the Politics of Ethnic Identity in Bahia* (2007) examines the thriving intersections of Afro-Brazilian religion, race, and social mobilization. By drawing out the many connections and conflicts among devotees of Candomblé, promoters of identity politics during community festivals, and Afro-Brazilian Evangelicals, whose resistant attitude condemns Candomblé as "devil worship," Selka succeeds in placing race and "racial democracy" at the heart of both the search for alternative identities and a Black consciousness movement in the collective struggle against racism.¹⁷ Selka's contributions to the debate on religiosity and Afro-Brazilian identity can be summed up as follows: (1) Blackness and religiosity have contradictory relationships; (2) racial identity in Brazil is historically cultural rather than political; (3) religion is inseparable from racial, cultural, and political identities; (4) Brazilian racial ideology often puts adherents of Catholicism, Candomblé, and Evangelicalism in conflict with each other despite their common Black identity; and (5) individuals and communities tend to negotiate Blackness and religious affiliations in contradictory forms. Beyond these theoretical and anthropological ruminations, Selka establishes a fundamental relationship between Candomblé and Afro-Brazilian identity, especially when he describes how this relationship has become part of daily life in Bahia:

Candomblé terreiros enjoy all the legal rights of any other religion. One example of this openness is the ubiquity of Candomblé symbols and images throughout the city. At a public park in the center of town (Duque de Tororó), for example, large statues representing the different Candomblé orixás are displayed in the middle of a lake. Smaller versions of each statue are found at different places on a path around the water along with explanations of the characteristics of each orixá and the Catholic saint(s) with which they are identified.¹⁸

By analyzing the ritualization, politicization, and globalization of religion, Selka concedes the intimacy between religion, as an instrument of

Afro-Brazilian identity formation, and the struggle against the vestiges of racism in Brazil.

If Selka's study examines the connection between Afro-Brazilian identity and religiosity, Vagner Gonçalves da Silva's study "Religion and Black Cultural Identity" stresses the tensions between Roman Catholics, Afro-Brazilians, and Neopentecostals.¹⁹ In his dense anthropological study, Silva describes the conflict among these three distinct religious groups, who nonetheless share a common Afro-Brazilian identity. Despite the differing positions on how best to agitate for political empowerment, the three religious agencies all thrive through their use of African symbols in the affirmation of Brazilian identity. Silva advances three main arguments: (1) Afro-Brazilian religions are central to the construction of Black identity; (2) Black Catholic movements appropriate aspects of Afro-Brazilian religiosity through the inculturation of theology and liturgy; and (3) Black evangelicals deny Afro-Brazilian religiosity as the central thrust for the construction of identity. Silva describes the processes through which the Brazilian government created public policies that were geared toward recognizing, protecting, preserving, and conserving the material heritage of Afro-Brazilian religions. Silva also highlights the gradual transformation of religion into a cultural heritage and how this heritage is further threatened by the religious fanaticism and intolerance of evangelicals. By their paradoxical exclusion of Africa from Brazilian culture, the Black evangelical movement deploys Black theology as a form of liberation politics without any recognition of African religious or cultural values, which are considered demonic activities. Silva notes of this tendency:

Another alternative has been the reappropriation of symbols associated with African legacy in the Pentecostal context, but in a form that is disassociated from their relationship to the Afro-Brazilian religions. One example is the *Capoeira de Cristo*, also known as "Evangelical Capoeira" or "Gospel Capoeira," where the words contain no references to the Orishas or Catholic saints.²⁰

Just as the Black evangelical movement attempts to distance itself from Africa, another movement among the devotees of Candomblé is pushing for the purity and authenticity of Afro-Brazilian religions by advancing a re-Africanization dynamic that eschews the influences of Catholicism

or syncretism. Brazil may well continue to operate in this quagmire, caught between negotiating its mixed-race identity and transforming diverse Afro-Brazilian religiosities into weapons of political agitation and participation.

As much as Candomblé suffers from persecution from religious fanatics, it continues to enjoy the interest of scholars and devotees alike. Stefania Capone's seminal *Searching for Africa in Brazil* combines a complex erudition of the field of Afro-Brazilian Candomblé with a compelling ethnography. Her study attests to the premise that anthropology and Candomblé are intertwined. While Capone's study synthesizes the vast terrain of Candomblé scholarship, especially in Bahia, it also illuminates the complexity of race mixture and its bearing on religious rituals in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, while emphasizing the challenge of debates on purity and authenticity in Afro-Brazilian Candomblé. The tripartite work, focusing on "The Metamorphoses of Exu," "Ritual Practice," and "The Construction of Tradition," also sums up recurrent controversies surrounding the shifting meanings of Exu in Candomblé worship and tradition. Capone raises a few foundational questions: (1) Why is Exu misunderstood as a diabolic character by Christian missionaries and not as a well-venerated deity of the crossroads, a divine messenger, mediator, and trickster, as he was celebrated among devotees of Candomblé? (2) Despite Exu's acceptance among Candomblé devotees, why is the same deity not accepted as an orthodox deity for initiation and possession rituals? (3) How did anthropologists, like Nina Rodrigues, Édison Carneiro, and Ruth Landes, intervene in debates on Nagô purity? In responding to these questions, Capone asserts that discourses about the purity and impurity of Candomblé houses overlap because they have been primarily advanced by Candomblé elite leaders to privilege the survival of the tradition itself amidst discourses of racial miscegenation and racial democracy. She goes on to challenge the contradictions of the marginalization of Exu despite its integration within Candomblé, especially during the re-Africanization movement of the 1970s. She ends by suggesting that devotees of Candomblé were active participants in the divisive debate of purity that accords Candomblé the status of a religion and relegates any form of religious syncretism to the realm of magic, witchcraft, and barbarity. In praise of the efforts toward purity, Capone suggests that the way forward is for syncretism to align more with the Africanizing tendencies of Candomblé Nagô: "Communication between Afro-Brazilian religions hinges on Exu because he is the only

divinity present in all cult modalities. Therefore the less pure religions should look to their ‘sister religions’ that are closer to the true African tradition, in order to correct the mistakes of syncretism.”²¹ In sum, Capone exposes the contradictions of Candomblé, as both tradition and power, in the midst of hegemonic forces suppressing its vitality in an era of religious fanaticism, intolerance, and persecution. The foregoing issues about the complexities of Afro-Brazilian religious practices as manifest in the sacred and popular spheres offer an opportunity to examine how cultural production engages these contentious domains as protagonist and antagonist alike, often embodying the same ambiguities that play out in day-to-day social realities.

Overview of Chapters

The first part of this study conceptually maps Afro-Brazilian altars as the domain of the sacred, arguing that relocated religious practices are reenacted in performative, musical, and print media. Through an analysis of an interdisciplinary ensemble of works and archives, this study establishes ritual structures and strictures that are recurrent in the annual festivals, which have come to be denominated “the cycle of festivals” and that begin in June and continue until carnival in February or March. Classic studies, such as Ruth Landes’s *City of Women* (1947), Mello Moraes Filho’s *Festas e Tradições Populares do Brasil* (1979), and Jorge Amado’s *Bahia de Todos os Santos* (1977), yield to more analytical and sociological studies about the intersection of the sacred and the profane, such as Anadelia Romo’s *Brazil’s Living Museum* (2010), Cheryl Sterling’s *African Roots, Brazilian Rites* (2013), Scott Ickes’s *African-Brazilian Culture and Regional Identity in Bahia, Brazil* (2013), and John Collins’s *Revolt of the Saints* (2015). Yet, all of these studies struggle to articulate any radical alternatives to racial hierarchy, the same racial hierarchy that is embedded in cultural productions and that reinforces the stereotypes and contradictions of racial democracy.

Chapter 1, “Activating the Sacred,” elaborates the historical contexts for Afro-Brazilian ritual. After this contextualization, chapter 2, “Pierre Verger and Yoruba Ritual Altars,” deconstructs Verger’s preservation of African religious traditions in Brazil from the viewpoint of his “colonial gaze.” This chapter touches on issues such as Wole Soyinka’s ownership of the plot in *Death and the King’s Horseman*; Verger’s wrongfully accusation

of being a French “spy” in Nigeria; Soyinka’s alleged dramatic rescue of Yoruba artifacts from Verger’s possession in Brazil; and the critique of Verger’s perceived colonial penchant in comparison with other Africana scholars of religious studies. From ritual altars to Candomblé houses, chapter 3, “Matriarchs of Candomblé: Mãe Stella de Oxóssi, Mãe Beata de Yemonjá, and Mãe Valnizia Bianch,” argues that these three exemplary Candomblé priestesses serve as vital matriarchal embodiments for the preservation of knowledge in the Afro-Brazilian temples under their care. Through their social-activist agendas and creative works, these matriarchs make an impact on Candomblé and on the world beyond the confines of their immediate sacred space. By analyzing how Afro-Brazilian altars and rituals serve as evidence of the sacred, this section argues that they evidence a continued resistance to the violent instrumentalities of state persecution and an end to religious intolerance and racial inequality.

The second part, which constitutes literary manifestations of the sacred, compares several writers and their representative works. In chapter 4, Jorge Amado’s *Mar Morto* (Sea of death) (1933) is compared with Vasconcelos Maia’s *O Leque de Oxum* (Osun’s mirror) (2006) to articulate the idea of marine power as exercised by the Yemoja and Osun divinities. Chapter 5 compares Abdias Nascimento’s *Sortilégio II* (Black sorcery) (1979) and Nelson Rodrigues’s *Anjo Negro* (Black angel) (1946) to tease out how Blackness is a subject of ridicule and oppression within the myth of racial democracy. Chapter 6 compares Zoran Seljan’s *Três Mulheres de Xangô* (Three wives of Sango) (1978) and Dias Gomes’s *O Pagador de Promessas* (Payment as pledged) (1960) to analyze how they reimagine the divinity of Sango (the deity of thunder) through the prisms of feminist solidarity and masculine revenge. Chapter 7 compares Raul Longo’s *Filhos de Olorum* (God’s children) (2011) with Robson Pinheiro’s *Tambores de Angola* (Drums of Angola) (2004) to unveil the secrets of healing and spirituality as embodied in the rites of Candomblé. Finally, chapter 8 examines Cléo Martins and Chynae’s invocative representations of Oiá and Oxóssi in *Ao Sabor de Oiá* (To the flavor of Oya) (2003) and *Encantos de Oxóssi* (Enchantments of Oxóssi) (2009) and how they express passionate encounters befitting of their characteristics. Exemplifying the complexities of magical realism, the ritualization of power, the negation of racial democracy, the recuperation of traditional powers of empowerment in the face of racial oppression, and the imperative of justice through regeneration, this entire section examines the struggle to overcome the odds inherent in racial discrimination and religious intolerance and

especially the struggle to assert total being without compromising what may be considered a Black aesthetic of affirmation. In sum, the sacred in these literary manifestations is a constant reminder that Afro-Brazilian literary rituals are not ashamed to incorporate African cosmologies and sacredness into their creative endeavors toward sociopolitical liberation and self-affirmation in the New World.

The last section shifts from the literary to the performative and cultural, focusing on blocos afros (Afro-Bahian carnival groups), afoxés (Afro-religious carnival groups), and the significance of acarajé as a sacred offering turned popular and commercial food item in Brazil. In the first part, this study employs a comparative focus to analyze Afro-Brazilian performance groups. Chapter 9 compares Filhos de Gandhi (Children of Gandhi) (1949), an established afoxé, with Cortejo Afro (Afro-Brazilian procession) (1998), a contemporary and emergent bloco afro. Both groups are attached to Candomblé practices, but while the latter manifests a popular expression of spirituality-infused Carnival on the streets, an expression that is devoid of religiosity, Filhos de Gandhi is openly religious. Against this background, this study argues that more established Afro-carnival groups serve as a form of mirroring agency that brings illumination and visibility to marginalized and less visible social groups. In chapter 10, “Give Us This Day Our Daily Acarajé,” this study analyzes the effects of relocation and commercialization on traditional sacred food items by comparing the traditional Yoruba bean cake, which is fried in red palm oil, to its variation in Brazil (acarajé), which traveled through the Middle Passage and subsequently served as a ritual offering to Afro-Atlantic deities, such as Exu (Deity of the crossroads), Iasã (Oya, or deity of strong winds and storms), and Xangô (Deity of thunder and fire). By comparing the two sacred food items, this study argues that acarajé has become a hybridized culinary item, one that is now available widely in Brazilian cuisine. This final section highlights cultural manifestations that ordinarily would be repressed by virtue of their connection with prohibited sacred rites. It argues that the outlet for the popularization of the sacred, which is permitted by the performative and the cultural, offers a form of negotiation through this process of hybridization.

However, the question remains: to what extent is the sacred dislocated when the popular is relocated within the popular zone? Covering critical moments of the empowerment of Blacks from the post-military dictatorship era through the end of the Lula presidency, this study examines whether hybridity solves racial tension by proposing in-depth

structural solutions that will bring about radical and permanent equality or whether it simply sweeps racial tension under the rug by giving social agitators a carnival-like moment to temporarily escape perpetual afflictions. When the sacred meets the profane, the negotiation of that encounter conjures the possibility of hope for a better tomorrow. But is it an affirmation of the transformative change that is urgently and politically needed? One wonders whether this moment of negotiation is transient—because the sacred is no longer persecuted like it was during the nineteenth century—or whether it is a moment of complacency that submits to the power of co-optation and renders change impossible or just a dream deferred? These are some of the reflections that the present study's triangulation of sacredness, ritualization, and hybridization quantifies and qualifies through its critical analysis of contexts, texts, and comparative prisms. For a lack of a better expression, it is as if hybridity brings about an inadvertent praise of a contradiction. Ideally, Afro-Brazilians should aspire more toward the authenticity of their Africanness than the conscious negotiation of their Brazilianness. But due to an oppressive system, they are forced to give up their sense of affirmation and subscribe to a convenient sense of alienation and cordial hybridity. In other words, this book will be less a facile celebration of hybridity than a critique, especially in the context of social equality.

Defining Concepts

Given the specific nature of the book as it relates to the intersection of the sacred and secular, it is useful to define some recurrent concepts. These are concepts that may not exhaust the topic per se but nonetheless provide foundational understanding of the ideas that are explored. Sacred rites are religious rituals, such as baptism, and special remembrance masses for the saints, such as Christmas and Easter. These rituals also have their secular, post-Christian celebrations, such as Réveillon and carnival. Ritualizations, meanwhile, are repetitive events that can be either sacred or secular. The only distinction between rituals and ritualizations is whether they qualify as “sacred” or “secular.” In the context of Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions, both terms operate intersectionally. Sacred rituals, which are by nature ritualized, can only be distinguished by the specific spaces in which they are enacted, such as inside or outside the parameters of the church or shrine. On rare occasions of negotiation between

the sacred and the secular, such as the radical performance of *Missa dos Quilombos* (1982) by Milton Nascimento, which indicts slavery within the sacred space of the Catholic Church, such a negotiation serves as a measure of pacification and reconciliation with Catholicism for past racial injustice and repression of African religiosity. When it comes to popular culture, these multiple dimensions of the sacred and spiritual are inseparable. Melville and Frances Herskovits have noted the tension between Candomblé devotees and the Catholic Church, arguing for the need to cultivate partnerships between American Black intelligentsia and the local press to negate the negative stereotypes associated with the Africa-derived worship. According to these scholars, the dominant classes understood the power of public festivals as a hybrid social structure geared toward controlling public opinion, discourse, and the ultimate meaning of ritualized performative acts. Popular culture was thus a crafty outlet for bottled-up frustrations by marginalized Afro-Brazilian populations.

As multiple cultures come together, there is bound to be some gradual hybridizations or negotiations of identity. For example, David T. Haberly describes the historic formation of Brazil as a negotiation between “the three sad races.”²² Hybridization in this context shares similar properties as hybridity and describes a process of identification that is neither Black nor white but both. Yet, groups fighting for a singular identity beyond the hybrid often feel fragmented, suffocated, and even negated. For example, the poor Black communities of Salvador have resisted and challenged unilateral forms of identity such as the hybrid, which they feel marginalizes the reconstruction of a Black identity that counters the myth of racial democracy (the false racial equality of Gilberto Freyre) and that creates political and economic conditions that make ancestral Africanity or Africanness impossible.²³ Of course, to survive, these groups recuperate and produce African identity through the diacritical signs of religiosity and the popularization of the sacred, such as in carnivalesque manifestations. This leads to the acceptance of an identity that is simultaneously ethnic, flexible, and plural. In a gradual process of challenging and condoning racial democracy and hybridizations, Black cultural producers insist on religious syncretism, while also leveraging for the reclamation of a kind of identity that does not totally submit to erasure but is accommodating only to the degree that total identitarian power is not usurped. In the case of Olodum, accepting whites into parades is critical to economic survival. Meanwhile, the nonacceptance of whites into Ilê Aiyê’s carnival parades is an ideological statement and a form of

cultural resistance. By its very politics, identity is about power dynamics and influence, especially in a culture as diverse as Brazil, which must assert a sense of control over its existing social hierarchy.

Brazilian identity is thus plagued by the following questions: Who gets to be called “Brazilian”? What benefits accrue to such individuals? What influence do they exercise, and who is marginalized and disenfranchised in the process of appropriating these benefits? Due to the brutal reality of colonization, slavery, and modernization (modernity), which brought about an influx of Europeans as industrial laborers, the formerly enslaved were marginalized in Brazilian society because they were no longer considered competitive. One consequence of such a condition is the necessity to struggle for citizenship once again, which was not effectively reassigned after the abolition of slavery in 1888. Modernity is an era of the appropriation of new economic values and a new economic order, which disenfranchised the ex-slave in favor of new immigrants—namely Europeans and the Japanese. African identity was at once a battle for self-affirmation and a claim for national belonging. In relation to modernity, Africanness or Africanness must be seen as the effort to reclaim an identity that was fragmented during the tortuous period of enslavement. But it is also a radical process of re-Africanization that began in the 1970s. This process of re-Africanization was geared toward self-affirmation, self-esteem, and a sense of humanity and pride to provide a platform for reclaiming civil rights and socioeconomic benefits. In the intersections between the sacred and the profane, Afro-Brazilian entities who were struggling for the recognition of their humanity first had to establish reverence for the Catholic Church, thereby ensuring their own cultural values by creating equivalent power dynamics between Candomblé rites and African divinities, on the one hand, and Catholic saints, on the other. This arduous but ingenious process, which John F. Collins has appropriately termed the “revolt of the saints,” is a hybrid and a sign of resilience, as the marginalized groups mobilize for racial equality and social justice.

Because the most resilient Afro-Brazilian cultural productions manifest in the domain of the sacred, such as Candomblé, the sacred has been the central space of affirmation before it transitioned to blocos afros and afoxés, which support the cultural mobilization of performative rituals staged on the streets. This tripartite partnership must be seen as operating interfacially without any contradictions. Candomblé is what Rachel Harding aptly termed an “alternative space of blackness,” primarily