

Books Reviewed (Online)

Ickes, Scott. *African-Brazilian Culture and Regional Identity in Bahia, Brazil.* Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2013. 322 pp. Illustrations. Appendix. Glossary. Bibliography. Index.

In this study, Scott Ickes submits an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion/epilogue. He also offers a list of illustrations and abbreviations, an appendix, notes, glossary, bibliography, and an index. The book renders an historical overview of Salvador from the 1930s to the 1950s, occasionally transcending that time-frame to introduce insightful comparisons with the rest of the country, most often with Rio de Janeiro and/or São Paulo. Focusing on Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, especially in relation to questions of authority, legitimacy, the consent of rule, and ideological negotiation, the author analyzes the discourse of cultural inclusion, relations of power in Salvador as well as in the rest of the country, vis-à-vis Getúlio Vargas' political and economic policies, and his overarching project on cultural identity and "Brazilianness." To accomplish that, Ickes turns to public festivals and ritual performances, analyzing the central role journalists, writers, intellectuals, artists, and politicians had in altering "the ideological evaluation of those practices after 1930" (15). Although, in general, the book seems to target a reading public that is less familiar with Bahian culture and its historical process, in some parts, the author deepens the analyses to allow those already familiar with the region to see the intersections where history, politics, popular culture, and regional identity come together to form the larger discourse of modernization in Bahia.

As the title of chapter one ("Salvador, Bahia, 1930–1954") indicates, it is a chronological introduction to the political, cultural, and economic realities of the city during that period. It also provides an overview of the "the colonial attitudes and relationships" (such as the patron-client relationship) which survived well into the mid-twentieth century (20). Although the author is focusing on a limited time period, his conclusions can be extended beyond that time-frame. Clientelism, and "the vertical glue that bonded social relationships" (20), is still alive and well in contemporary Salvador. This chapter also paves the way for discussions presented in subsequent chapters by introducing Vargas' "carrot-and-stick economic measures" and his "corporatist vision of an organic, hierarchically ordered, and harmonious social body" (21). In particular, it addresses

Vargas' political agenda, populist maneuvers, and cultural policy, which used both patronage and censorship to lure intellectuals and artists to contribute to the consolidation of his project of nationalism.

Chapter 2 (“Revitalization of African-Bahian Culture”) opens with an introduction to Juracy Magalhães, an outsider and great communicator from the state of Ceará, who was appointed by Vargas in 1931 as governor of Bahia and, from the regime's point of view, became a very successful interventor, making ample usage of “co-optation and compromise” (42). To accomplish that, he copied Vargas' tactics and introduced a significant “number of administrative and political measures that promoted bonds between the working class and himself” (41). He also engaged public intellectuals (such as Jorge Amado and Édison Carneiro) in his project, by establishing alliances with them and reaching out to popular art forms, festivities, and Afro-Brazilian traditions, and lifting bans that prohibited their practices. This chapter also offers an introduction to the history of *Candomblé*, *capoeira*, *samba*, and the ritual Washing of the Church of Bonfim.

In Chapter 3, “Performing Bahia: Public Festivals, Samba, and African-Bahian Agency,” Ickes expands on previous references to festivities and Afro-Brazilian traditions in Salvador. In addition, he discusses “Festas Juninas,” “Festas de Largo” (which take place at public plazas close to a Catholic church), and the festival of *Yemanjá* in Rio Vermelho, offering an overview of the historical and political process of their development.

Chapter 4 (“Rituals of Inclusion: Evolving Discourses of Bahianness”) addresses how the State employed popular festivities and rituals to win over elites, institutionalize popular culture in Salvador, and bank on the potential the African-derived festivities and rituals had to attract tourism to the region. This chapter contributes new discussions on the “corporativist social vision of the *Estado Novo*” (107), and the role the State Museum of Bahia played in disseminating and legitimizing the Afro-Brazilian experience in Salvador. It also introduces Otávio Mangabeira, the post *Estado Novo* governor elected in Bahia, who made a concerted effort to engage people and establish a compromise with the higher echelons of society. As Ickes summarizes Mangabeira's position on the issue, “[for him], the popular festivals were an opportunity to get across his paternalistic message of a tutelary ‘Christian democracy’ and Bahian unity across society” (112). This chapter also revisits and expands on the roles journalists and newspapers had in stimulating the growth of the public festivals and rituals, and addresses the impact that Jorge Amado's literature had on establishing pride in the working-class culture in Salvador and in its Africanness. He analyzes the symbolic meaning that the street vendors (*baianas*) and the food they sold rendered to the concept of *baianidade*, and examines how Carmen Miranda's performance and Dorival Caymmi's musical trajectory readdressed this symbolism.

Chapter 5, “Carnival of the People: *Batucadas* and *Afoxés*,” discusses the relevant ways Afro-Bahians used to transform carnival in Salvador into a more inclusive public festivity. This section of the book presents the chronological development of the Afro-Bahian presence and the contributions that the press,

the Association of Carnival Chroniclers, and the mayor's office gave in raising attention to the percussion-based carnival groups by offering prizes and awards. This chapter also walks the reader through "the standard historiographic narrative on Bahian carnival" (144), from 1880 to 1950s, discussing the parades, *entrudos*, *lança-perfume*, the Filhos de Gandhi group and other *afoxés*, the development of *trio elétricos*, and the power and demise of elite clubs. In addition, Ickes examines the role that small clubs, the working class neighborhoods "known as *blocos*, *cordões*, *batucadas* and *afoxés*" (150), had in filling in the vacuum left when the prestige of elite clubs faded.

Chapter 6, "The Project of Regional Identity Formation: Culture, Politics, and Tourism," discusses the historical and political development of the Washing of Bonfim ritual, the Union of Afro-Brazilian Temples, and the alliances leaders of Candomblé made with members of the dominant class. It examines the impact CEAO (Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais) had in legitimizing Afro-Bahian culture, and examines the contributions that international scholars and artists (such as Pierre Verger, Roger Bastide, and Carybé) gave to reframe history and culture in Salvador. To further analyze those premises, in "Conclusions and Epilogue: Cultural Politics in Bahia," the author adds some post-1950s facts and figures.

Whenever Ickes returns to one of the elected topics or major figures in the chapters, he enlarges the debate by adding a new element to the discussion. Even though this structure allows him to maneuver a large number of topics and introduce a vast array of prominent political figures, artists, writers and intellectuals of the period, some passages of the book sound repetitive as he recaps or paraphrases information previously given in order to add some more elements. While the material is well researched, many parts of it are presented in bits and pieces and scattered throughout the book. (Compare, for instance, discussions on samba, capoeira, Candomblé, biographical information, and references to historical and political events accessible in the six chapters.) Each part ends with a "conclusion," which also echoes some of the elements already addressed. As a result, oftentimes the book has a didactic tone, the pace is slow, and a different structural arrangement could have provided a more dynamic set of discussions.

If, on the one hand, certain passages of the book appear to be a rehash of materials already discussed, on the other hand, the reemergence of ideas, concepts, or public figures presented previously creates a certain familiarity for the reader with the subjects discussed. It is a technique some authors use (most often in fiction) to induce readers to continue the process of reading, but which, in scholarly publications, can be deemed as an untimely recurrence. In a loosely-related way, Ickes's use of the technique of enticement emulates Vargas' "carrot-and-stick" measures that he rightly criticizes. In that sense, readers may feel manipulated or forced to put together dispersed slices of information to construct a block narrative of how each of those politicians, artists, intellectuals, public festivals, and popular traditions contributed to "the evolving discourses of "bahianess" (99). It can be counter-argued, however, that in post-modernity readers are no longer passive recipients of information and are often led to become co-creators

of the materials they are reading. Regardless of the position taken, it is undeniable that *African-Brazilian Culture and Regional Identity in Bahia, Brazil* offers one of the most encompassing studies on different aspects of several traditions of African origins in Bahia. It establishes connections with the historical, political, and intellectual voices of the time (1930s–1950s), and delivers this large set of information in one single volume.

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