Introduction

This book explores the origins, religious idioms, symbols, internal and diasporic diffusions, and the music, dance, and drama that accompany African and African Diaspora masks and masquerade performances. The relevance of an inquiry of this nature cannot be overemphasized. Masquerades embody the essence of African civilization and the spirit of culture and customs that translate meanings to certain dimensions of the continent’s complex history. The songs, dance, drama, poetry, proverbs, and other accoutrements of practices that go with the masquerade performances also represent a repertoire of intellectual traditions crucial to the recovery of aspects of lost African pasts. The rituals associated with masking define the fluid structures of power and authority, patterns of civil society networks, and the people’s social consciousness. The changing faces of African-styled masquerade carnivals hold a mirror on the variegated impact contacts with alien cultures have brought upon Africans and their diasporic descendants.

In examining the changes that have permeated the masquerade spectacle in the last four centuries, this study probes the interconnections among masquerade narratives, memory, reinventions, and transnationalism. Centering on the role of the Igbo, one of the most visible Bight of Biafra hinterland ethnic groups involved in transatlantic commercial exchanges, the inclination toward ethnici- zation of African cultural artifacts in the Americas is problematized. The argument is put forth that enslaved Africans should be understood as Bantu-African culture modeling agents or culture carriers who tried to reenact vestiges of their inherited traditions in alien societies. While the Bantu culture is contagious, often the traditions the modelers enacted were not exact replicas of the African prototypes—and they need not be. Cultural diffusions or modeling are dynamic and do not usually re-create the original. Modeling agents use simulations or scaled-down versions of the original to show how an event might occur under specific circumstances, and they may not work in an exact way or as the object...
Introduction

or system they represent. Beginning from the sixteenth century, African-themed cultural activities in the New World were dilutions of a conglomerate of practices from several ethnic African and European nations nurtured on American soil. As models help scientists develop explanations about a natural phenomenon that may be difficult to observe, so should we appreciate African American cultural artifacts and study them within the dialectics of traditions and adaptations.

The terms *adaptation*, *time*, and *space* are central to this study because Afri
cana masquerades are not just entertainment tools in static mode. In the Bight of Biafra hinterland Bantu Culture Area, masquerades, in their adaptive nature, served as a genre of literary engagee in the oral and performative style. Masquerade narrative is interpreted here as a method of committed and organic literary discourse in performative form. Customarily, African masquerades symbolize the conscience of a society. They provide a platform to promote identity; prop-
agate, defend, or pursue a cause or ideology; and recover or reshape collective consciousness in a constantly changing world. While enslaved Africans extended this dynamic role of masquerades to the slaveholding American society, the challenges that they were confronted with in the new society were quite different from those they were acquainted with in the Bight of Biafra Culture Area, which, as the original homeland of the Bantu, gave birth to the larger Bantu Culture Area.

The notion of culture areas is not new in academic discourses, but the idea of a Bantu Culture Area has not been applied to any study on African culture transfers to the New World. Proponents of the diffusion theory in America, otherwise known as the “American School of Diffusion,” hold the view that people learn and appropriate rudiments of culture they encounter and as the rate of interaction between cultures increases, so do the probability of borrowing and learning. Melville Herskovits argues that cultures in an area tended to form clusters that are “sufficiently homogenous in regions on which they occur [that] can be delimited on a map.”1 Nita Mathar defines culture area as “the geographical space in which similar cultures are found.”2 The American diffusionists believe that by mapping spatial distribution of traits in specific geographical spaces, one can then easily illuminate the parallels and variances among cultures.3 The initial articulation of culture areas as a paradigm in the American ethnographic academy go back to 1895 when Otis T. Mason used the term *culture area* in his work.4 Other scholars building on this have since expanded the theory by cor-
relating dominant cultural traits with geographical spaces.5 Clark Wissler pro-
vided a conceptual and methodological approach to the study when he stated that if “we take all traits into simultaneous consideration and shift our point of
Introduction

view to the social or tribal units, we are able to form fairly definite groups. This will give us culture areas, or a classification, of social groups according to their cultural traits." In other words, social groups may be geographically dispersed but still form a common cultural identity.

The African presence in the New World was a Pan-African project. Thus, rather than pursuing a narrow ethnic model, which arbitrarily assigns agency to certain African groups while ignoring others, I have adopted the Bantu Culture Area model as a more embracing paradigm for the hundreds of ethnic nations represented by the enslaved Africans in the Americas. This inclusive approach precludes disjointed and disembodied stories. It offers a nuanced explanation of the inherent distance crossings, fluidity, similarities, and variables associated with African and African American cultural complexes. The distinction brought into purview is the degree of changes that were already affecting the masquerade tradition in Africa prior to its departure to the Americas. The counterpoints include the interface among the centuries of internal and cross-regional exchanges, changes brought upon the culture by Islamization, Christianization, and colonization within the continent and in the African Diasporas; the (re-) secularization of the institutions that were in the past exclusively for male initiates; and the masquerades’ intersections with the European culture as globalization deepens and expands.

In the past four decades, masquerade studies have attracted a significant amount of scholarly curiosity as new study methods continue to boost our understanding of the manifold and multifaceted processes that created the African Diasporas. Early on in the 1940s, the broad subject of cultural transfers and retentions (of which masquerading is a big part) among enslaved Africans emerged as one of the dominant topics of debate among scholars of the Black Atlantic. The attraction to this idea soon created two opposing schools of thought. The first school, identified heretofore as the “African Culture Retention School,” was championed by Melville Herskovits, while the second, the “Tabula Rasa School,” was advocated by Stanley Elkins. With The Myth of the Negro Past (published in 1941), which aimed to dignify the frontiers of new traditions the enslaved Africans fostered in the Americas, Herskovits launched the canon of studies that has today grown exponentially. But in 1959, Elkins challenged the Retention School with his declaration that the cultural difference between Africans and African Americans was wider than one could imagine. Elkins provocatively affirmed that the African slaves who survived the perilous Middle Passage suffered memory blackout or cultural annihilation: “Nearly every prior connection had been severed.” In a rhetorical question as to where the slaves would look for new
knowledge, traditions, values, etiquette, standards, and cues, Elkins concluded that it was the White planters of America who owned the slaves. In 1978, Albert Raboteau, who studied African traditional religious survivals in the American South, backed the tabula rasa hypothesis with a bold declaration that the slaves’ “African religious heritage was lost.”

It is not that the Elkinses and Raboteaus are completely off the mark with their views. The violence and cruelty that characterized the Middle Passage incontestably depleted the victims’ physical, psychological, and mental well-being. However, the idea of a permanent memory blackout is an overreach at the fringes of pseudoscience. First, a misrepresentation of this magnitude betrays a lack of elementary knowledge of human psychology, which recognizes the role of nature and nurture in the molding of life-long characters and skills. Second, the advocates of the tabula rasa argument tend to forget that ellipsis of memory is not unique to enslaved Africans. Amnesia often goes with remembering, and the critical issue is not essential that amnesia or forgetfulness might occur. What matters most is which realities gave the individual or group a full sense of identity or relevance and making the memory or what we remember to respond to the challenges of life experiences. Third, how anyone can completely strip a grown-up person of agency and then reduce him or her to the level of Pavlov’s dog, in this case, subject to an operant culture reconditioning, is altogether difficult to contemplate.

Like the Tabula Rasa School, the culture retention argument also betrays serious conceptual and heuristic flaws. Partly fueling the culture transfer/retention debate is the attempt by the previous studies to ethnicize African Diaspora slave cultural artifacts. This is a tricky monologue because the paradigm tends to ignore the dynamism and centrality of spatial reasoning—that is, the tendency to imagine things with limited information. Cultural diffusion and modeling, as the accounts of the Bantu migrations and the transatlantic slave trade conjure, could hinder narrow ethnic thinking. Like transatlantic slavery, Bantu population movements show that cultures in motion are like a rolling stream; they acquire new tastes and colors in relation to the ecosystem. Although not often emphasized, results from recent studies on African masquerade arts carnivals expose the intricate intersections among diffusion, spatial reasoning, complex interactions, and the role of memory in masquerade narratologies responsive to the pressing needs of the present.

A closer look at Abner Cohen’s seminal studies on masquerade carnivals, for instance, reveals a continuous reinvention of village-based customs in both the
urban centers of Africa and the African Diasporas by migrants arriving from the countryside. As Cohen discloses, these city-based masquerades are never the same as their village-based prototypes because, as the social setting has changed, so did the narrative and presentation. Philip Scher’s *Carnival and the Formation of the Caribbean Transnation* takes a global perception of carnivals as contested arenas of politics and identity formation in both the island state of Trinidad and Trinidadian communities in England, the United States, and Canada. Again, the cosmopolitan carnivals are adapted to the dictates of modern politics in new environments rather than the same versions associated with the slave plantation era. Norman Stolzoff and Gerard Aching have further explored a similar theme in their separate studies on the Caribbean, including Cuba. The authors investigated the use of masks as an instrument of power and political mobilization in these racially bifurcated societies as the contours of power and authority continue to shift. Put together, these studies communicate a clear message that to grasp and predict masquerades and their behaviors, scholars must look at the interactions between location and realities of a sociopolitical milieu rather than the shape of a past tradition found in one area. This calls to mind Stanley Littlefield, Dele Jegede, and Esther Dagan’s description of African masks and masquerades as a continuing art form paralleling shifting religious belief systems, theater performances, artistic productions, nationalistic identities, and much more.

The constant shifts demand revisions and new approaches that sometimes present conceptual challenges. In 1990, John Gray came to an epiphany when he advocated for a Pan-African approach as a future direction of research on the resilient Afro-Creole masquerade culture. Perhaps this may have motivated Ivor Miller’s works on the Abákuá masquerade of Cuba, which he sees as an extension of Èfik-style Èkpè masquerade in modern Nigeria; and Robert W. Nicholls’s *Old-Time Masquerading in the Virgin Islands*, which links the masquerade carnival in that island enclave with the Igbo prototypes. Similarly, Toyin Falola and coauthors’ volume, *Orisa*, explored various aspects of Yoruba gods and spiritual identities in Africa and the African Diasporas. Other related studies such as *Igbo in the Atlantic World: African Origins and Diasporic Destinations*, edited by Toyin Falola and Raphael Chijioke Njoku; Linda Heywood’s edited volume *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*; and *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, edited by Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, have respectively explicated the dynamism of slavery and Igbo, Kongo/Angolan, and Yoruba contributions to African diasporic cultures. Revisiting
these studies offers a perspective on how to better comprehend African and African American masquerade carnivals as an active and fluid device for sociopolitical dialogue in a world in constant flux.

In essence, this study acknowledges that several millennia prior to the transatlantic slave trade, African culture was already experiencing changes through Bantuization, and studying African American culture in the Americas is a continuation of that change outside the African continent. As the Bantu population movements subjected African culture to a process of intense and dramatic refinements and harmonization, so did the transatlantic slave trade extend this process of harmonization to the Americas by way of creolization. In this process, both African and African American cultures became a collective programming, a mobile community of practices constructed on shared and pragmatic habits, values, maxims, and need-based observances within a group thought. Thus, situating the African Diaspora culture transfer discourse within the Bantu migration history makes sense: It helps further our appreciation of the far-reaching impacts of the Bantu beyond sub-Saharan Africa. While the story of the Bantu in relation to Black Africa is well known, frequently ignored is the influence of the migrations and the masquerade culture it brought to Islamized North Africa.

Second, positioning the discourse within the Bantu studies literature shows that long before the waterscapes began to serve as conduits of economic and cultural sharing between peoples and lands in the First Global Age (c. 1400–1800), landscapes (such as the Bantu migratory routes, the trans-Saharan trade routes, and the Silk Roads) have been serving as conduits of cross-regional exchanges on the global scale. This demonstrates how conventional arguments in history writing about the dynamics of the maritime world, distance crossings, the rise of the West, and the charm of colonial empires can be overturned by emphasizing dynamic, collaborative, and nonlinear networks as opposed to formal networks based on power, the Maxim gun, and social classes. The land-based networks in the Ancient Global Age (c. 2500–1400) and First Global Age reflect a different picture of global interactions. Landscapes emphasize the centrality of peoples, distance crossings, the materialities of cultures in motion, and other exchanges at different times in different parts of the world. Additionally, this book challenges certain chronological readings such as attempts to periodize the origin and spread of cultural traditions like masking and masquerading. It imposes a multivalent approach and urges scholars to think spatially and thematically instead—that is in a way that relates to the position, size, and relevance of ideas and concepts within specific geographical locations.
Spatial reasoning, as the accounts of the Bantu population movements and the transatlantic slave trade reveal, allows us to see what happens when culture modelers migrate with inherited tropes of values and symbols and the history they convey flows in multiple directions and across regions and culturescapes. Theophilus Okere explains that some values or symbols were destined for a transnational mission. Some “values are not only more permanent in time but seem destined for a universal vocation, eventually being accepted beyond their time and place of birth.” The imperative is a more nuanced construal, a cognition that recognizes the complexities inherent in the cross-regional diffusion of ideas and symbols.

Thus, rather than forcing the ethnic cloak on African American culture complexes, *West African Masking Traditions and Diaspora Masquerade Carnivals* prioritizes the subtleties of persistence, nostalgia, practices, memories, institutions, coping strategies, and structures that provided succor and character for those in bondage. The consideration is more on ways through which African epistemologies of religion, music, dance, and other repertoires of ideas embedded in the masquerade phenomenon aided enslaved people to survive oppression. The conscious or unconscious desire to reinvent African-themed cultural prototypes in the New World—whether successful or not—contributed to the subsequent growth of what we know today as African American art, music, and literature in particular and the Grand American culture in general.

Accordingly, contra the Tabula Rasa School, this study is also mindful of what Judith Bettelheim has noted about the “Herskovitsian retention model,” which she wearily describes as “a retardataire analysis, which stresses a continuous historical connection with Africa.” The Retentionists have contested that with the African presence, new cultural practices sprouted in the Americas and the realm of ritual and belief systems constituted the force around which African Americans organized themselves into a people with an identity. The point, however, remains that the overall intent of enslaved Africans’ cultural expressions was primarily geared toward survival rather than reinventing proto-African ethnic practices as many have passionately argued. Such ideas fail to capture the harsh circumstances confronting the slaves that we study of their history. Narrating her family experience, ex-slave Louisa Adam, born in Rockingham County, North Carolina, reminds us that “I tell you de truth, slave time wuz slave time wid us. My brother wore his shoes out, and had none all thu winter. His feet cracked open and bled so bad you could track him by the blood” [sic].

Louisa Adam’s picturesque is the actualities of slavery that should never be lost. The onus of inquiry then is on memory or the art of remembering...
surrounding the global journey of the brand of masquerade culture that the Biafra hinterland people invented and through the Bantu movements shared with their fellow Africans. The birth of this tradition goes back several millennia prior to the transatlantic slave trade and the European colonial expansions that followed. I have identified a culture zone in southeastern Nigeria where the Cross River Igbo, in partnership with their neighbors—the Èfik, Ibibio, Èkoi, and Ijọ—nurtured a very contagious brand of masquerading. The tradition was propagated as a device of representation that makes use of memory and narratology to safeguard social norms, restore harmony in the midst of chaos, and resolve societal issues. Exploring the materiality of cultural inventions of the various societies native to the original Bantu homeland, which encompasses the historic Bight of Biafra slave embarkation port, offers a path to a better appreciation of the diachronic interchanges between the Old World/Old Time masquerade traditions and the New World/New Time masquerade carnival culture.

In other words, this is a transregional, transatlantic world inquiry with emphasis on one of the most popular and continuing cultural dialogues between Africa and the Atlantic world. Colin A. Palmer has underscored that the name “Atlantic world” is not merely “a geographic expression but also a metaphor for the organic and human linkages that characterize it.” Along with this line of thought, Thomas Benjamin accentuates how the new transatlantic linkages the Europeans established in the fifteenth century “shall unloose the bonds of things.” This means that the merging of the Old and the New Worlds created opportunities for closer relationships between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. But the timeline and scope of the present study predate the beginning of the transatlantic exchanges. It incorporates the timeless precolonial African era, which I have named the Ancient Global Age, the supposed First Global Age, and the New Global Age (1800–present). Building on the theory of cooperation, human social networks, nonlinear dynamics, and the coupling of human and natural complex systems, as propounded by Steven H. Strogatz, among others, some perspective lights are shed on periods of African history, chiefly as it relates to cultural productions and regional exchanges in the ancient, medieval, and modern times. One of the major innovations provided is the use of “agent-based modeling” (also known as artificial intelligence) to simulate information about people or historical actors such as the Bantu in areas of the world and/or periods of time for which written sources are poor or nonexistent.
The Bantu as Culture Modeling Agents

The history of Bantu migration and cultural cross-fertilizations or diffusion highlights the theory of human social networks and the agent-based modeling system. The Bantu phenomenon remains one of the greatest migrations in human history considering the huge number of people involved, the time span, and more important, its extensive cultural impacts. Oral, linguistic, and archaeological sources show that the proto-Bantu group lived precisely in the areas bordering parts of the Benue-Cross River Basin of southeastern Nigeria, and western Cameroon. It is believed that the first Bantu migrants left this area earlier than 2500 BCE on what would become intermittent movements involving hundreds of generations now dispersed across the entire continent. The Bantu resettled everywhere with the appurtenances of material and nonmaterial cultures: religious ideas, new languages, and sociopolitical institutions. Some scholars have characterized the Bantu as violent and disruptors of established cultures in their environmental predation, while others see them more positively as culture carriers who helped in spreading sociocultural institutions that encouraged development across the continent.25

It is not the intention of this study to adjudicate the characterization of the Bantu. Rather, the Bantu are highlighted as culture modeling agents. Andre Grow and Jan Van Gavel have noted that the agent-based modeling paradigm is an emerging field in demographic studies with the potential to help scholars close “the gap between the conventional and an alternative approach to population studies by combining the advantages and limitations of both.”26 It is consequent to state that a study of the Bantu population movement embodies both the challenges and advantages of the conventional and the unconventional in historical narrative and social science research. In lieu of conformism, the Bantu migrations occurring several millennia ago are not entirely different from the influx of Europeans into the Americas between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries or the more recent refugee movements involving millions still unfolding in Western Europe and North America. Migration, which sometimes results in total displacement, is a constant part of human history. The unconventional implication, however, is apparent in assessing the impact of the Bantu in the framework of cultural inventions, syncretism, and hybridities in the ancient times. Daniel Courgeau and Jakub Bijak have outlined four successive but complementary sequences in agent-based modeling that, as the demographers noted, have been evolving since the seventeenth century. These are the period (time of the study), cohorts (number of people treated as a group), event-history (a longitudinal
record of when events happened for a number of people), and multilevel perspectives (multiple approaches and viewpoints involved in a change process). Both Bantu population movements and transatlantic slavery linked with the restless Bight of Biafra hinterland people have all the features outlined by Courgeau and Bijack: period, cohorts, event-history, and multilevel perspectives. The periods are twofold: 2500 BCE to 1400 CE and 1400 to 1800 CE. The cohorts are also twofold: the Bantu migrants crossing regional boundaries, and lending to and borrowing ideas and material cultures from alien societies; and the African slaves involved in the transatlantic exchanges sharing their memories of African culture in the Atlantic world while internalizing Western/American ideas and ways of life. Both historical episodes define the event-history and the inherent analytical multilevel perspectives, viewpoints, and challenges the events pose. With the spread of African cultural traditions, including religion and masquerading, agent-based modeling helps us to respond to three main challenges: how to overcome complexity in social history research of this nature, how to reduce its uncertainty in terms of clear-cut evidence and specific timelines, and how to reinforce its theoretical foundations. For demography, interactions between various populations systems are specifically examined. We then show how this approach enhances a study of this nature and the benefits it brings. Though the impact of the Bantu migration on Africa south of the Sahara is well known, there is nothing on the impact of the Bantu and the masquerade culture they brought to North Africa and of course the Americas. Original studies by anthropologist Edvard Westermarck have shed some light on how the Bantu culture extended its influence beyond the sub-Saharan region to North Africa with mask and masquerade observances in the pre-Islamic indigenous Berber North African society.

In respect to the transatlantic slave trade and the evolution of African American culture, the modeling approach, applied with the aid of information from available primary and secondary literature preserved in multiple languages—English, French, Igbo, Èfik, Ibibio, Ijo, and so on—furthers the nexus between migration and cultural invention and adaptations. The emergent cue is that cultural production and adaptation is a function of “cleave and compare”: when two or more alien cultures come in contact, they first form a cleavage (or a sharp division), which results in a dialogue or struggle—momentarily causing a confusion or chaos. Over time, however, the opposing cultures tend to find accommodation or outlet within a syncretic/hybridized context through comparison. Thus, hybridization is the soul of culture transfers: a product of nonlinear dynamics and chaos, made possible by the ability of the carriers of the cultures in
opposition to compare the practices they were more familiar with and adapt to some degree that which they have encountered. It is within this framework and the ensuing dialogue that the idea of cooperation is negotiated. Not only is this the setting in which African cultures developed; it is also the underlying premise that led to the birth of African American culture in the Americas.

Conceptual Approach and Sources

It is crucial to be aware of this inquiry’s multiple layers of multidisciplinary and comparative analytical praxis before peeling them off. For clarity, this is an African perspective on diaspora history. Throughout, the connecting thread across the various chapters is masquerading and the music, dance, and drama that accompany the festivities as sites of memory. The performances are conceived as a moving watercourse on a global journey. As it navigates through regions, landscapes, and waterscapes, masquerading acquire diverse idioms, tastes, and attributes with the masquerade culture modelers drawing their ideas from the archives of human memory. It is also obvious that African masquerades cannot be studied in isolation of the indigenous religion in which it is embedded. As the people’s religion shifted, so would the masquerade tradition as its offspring. In essence, this is a multidisciplinary inquiry crisscrossing diverse disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. While accentuating the intellectual episteme of masquerade dances, capturing the symbols and meanings inherent in African masking tradition furthers our state of knowledge in the ethnology and historical anthropology of African and African Diaspora cultures.

The main laboratory for this investigation is the Bantu original homeland where the Igbo, Èfik, Ibibio, Èkoi, and Ijọ of southeastern Nigeria live. As the evidence shows, the traditions native to this region are contagious, but not all Bantu culture traits are Igbo, Èfik, Ibibio, Kálábári or Ijọ in origin. The historical footprints left behind by the autochthonous inhabitants who have traversed the rainforest region for centuries not only edified the Bantu migratory routes but also shaped the prominence of the West African economic emporium known today as the Bight of Biafra, with Calabar as its main port. The assertion that the Bight of Biafra hinterland is the birthplace of the masquerade culture is predicated on three crucial historical facts. First, as expounded in the coming chapters, the most intricate masquerade rituals with out-of-this-world costuming were developed among the Igbo/Èfik/Ibibio/Ijọ. Moving out from this culture area, the masquerade traditions found in other parts of West and Central Africa exhibit a clear regressive involvement with religious ideologies,
the exercise of political authority, and the weight of privileges assigned to mas-
querade cults. Second, as culture carriers, the Bantu began to emigrate from this
area before 2500 BCE, and as they traversed the sub-Saharan African region,
they lent their traditions, including governmental systems, religion, and mas-
quera ding, and borrowed ideas and practices from their host societies. Third,
the Igbo/Èfik/Ibibio/Ij axis produced one of the highest num-
bers of victims of the transatlantic slave trade. Millions of captives from the
Bight’s hinterlands forcefully relocated to the Americas starting from about the
late sixteenth century joined forces with other enslaved Africans in the struggle
for freedom using their inherited Bantu culture, including ritual observances,
music, dance, and street theatre.

Accounts left behind by people of African descent in the New World and eye-
wit ness accounts by European travelers, planters, and administrators in colonial
America repeatedly mention the Igbo and the Bight of Biafra in African-themed
masquerade carnivals, music, and dance activities involving the enslaved. How-
ever, these sources cannot be used without caution. The Igbo did not live in
isolation of their Èfik, Ibibio, Ij, and other neighbors. They shared close cul-
tural traditions with these neighbors centuries prior to the beginning of the
transatlantic slave trade. Additionally, the Igbo did not form a single ethnic bloc.
Some Igbo communities found today in southeastern Nigeria have lived here
since the prehistoric era. Others moved in at different times. Therefore, cultural
immersions into the ancient Bantu traditions differed from place to place within
and outside Igboland. These differences challenge strict ethnicization of African
American cultural artifacts as Igbo, Èfik, Akán, or Mande for that matter.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the comparative focus is placed more on
Jamaica, the Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, and other places in the Carib-
bean where many Igbo slaves disembarked. These islands took in more Bight of
Biafra slaves than other places, and, more important, African-style masquerades
were not widely dispersed in North America other than in Louisiana. In the
New World, Igbo migrants shared everyday life with other enslaved Africans,
European planters, and Native Americans. The Igbo culture and their journey
started from the Igbo country in Nigeria.

Over the course of this research, I made ten different trips to southeastern/
southwestern Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, and Ghana between 2006 and 2017 to con-
duct ethnographical research. The present study is the first to combine both
the big and small pictures to deeply probe the question of origins in order to
identify multiple specific cultural practices associated with an ethnic group, a
culture area, and/or a demographic group in Africa and closely examine all these
along with African diasporic genres using the multilevel agent-based modeling paradigmatic approach.

Partly, some of the theoretical underpinnings of this book are sourced from pertinent agent-based modeling ideas related to cooperation studies. Much current agent-based modeling produces results that are either ahistorical or anachronistic if applied either to the Ancient Global Age or to the First Global Age. Cooperation, as Robert Keohane has noted, “Requires that the actions of separate individuals or organizations—which are not in pre-existent harmony—be brought into conformity with one another through a process of policy coordination.” A modified form of this theory is employed to further support the assertion that when alien cultures cross parts, they first engage in a process of dialogue and negotiation. Over time, the superior civilization tends to gain authority over the weaker culture. In West African history, for example, the Fulani militarily conquered the Hausa city-states in the early nineteenth century, but the Hausa language ended up emasculating the Fulani (Fula) language. Globally, the superior strength of Western education has triumphed over other traditional forms of socialization found in Asia, Africa, and pre-Columbian America. Likewise, the masquerade culture of the original Bantu homeland has claimed a prominent place within the mantra of popular cultures. This came about through its proven relevance as a tool of political administration, social mobilization capacity, and entertainment value. One unique part of this study on masquerades, which the African village elders cleverly promoted as political actors in spirit forms, is that it gives a sense of how the tradition has changed over time as the contexts and concepts continue to respond to changes both on the local and global arenas—from the ancient, medieval, colonial, and postcolonial eras.

Given the paucity of written works on precolonial Africa, snippets of data on masking from oral accounts are augmented with information from rare books and memoirs left behind by Arab and European visitors to Africa. These materials cover the period from the thirteenth to the late nineteenth-century colonization of Africa. Few examples include the writings of Ibn Battuta (1324); Leo Africanus (1526); Manuel Álvares (1526–1583); Anna Maria Falconbridge’s memoir published in series of letters (1794); John Barbot, who made a voyage to Old Calabar (1699); Thomas Astley and John Churchill (1732); C. G. A. Oldendorp, a missionary in Sierra Leone who wrote on Calabar (1777); Olaudah Equiano (1789); and many others.

Sources of information on the activities of African slaves in the colonial Americas—beginning from the fifteenth century European colonization of the
New World—came from newspaper reports and records left behind by colonial administrators, planters, and visitors. Examples include Hans Sloane (1752), Edward Long (1774), James Barclay (1777), Matthew Gregory Lewis (1816), Michael Scott (1836), Joseph Tuckerman (1837), Isaac Mendes Belisario (1838), Joseph John Gurney Charles (1840), and William Day (1852). These works, despite their flaws, provide a solid source of information when used along with the copious secondary literature on Caribbean masquerade carnivals.

Of course, a comparative study of this nature poses some anecdotal and logistic problems. First, Igbo (or any other ethnic) masks and masquerades cannot be studied in isolation from similar traditions found among the Èfik, Ibibio, and Ijọ neighbors. Before the late nineteenth-century beginnings of European colonialism in Africa, the Igbo and their various neighbors had been exchanging cultural institutions and ideas through ritual, economic, trading, political, war, and marriage interactions. In essence, Igbo traditions and institutions are products of both internal and external forces. This is where the idea of a Cross River Basin Bantu Culture Area model is found relevant. However, critics such as Julian Steward and Marvin Harris have accentuated three main shortfalls of the culture area approach: “(1) center and boundary change with passage of time, (2) culture within the area may change so that it resembles cultures in different areas at different times, and (3) portions of the area may be regarded as containing radically different cultures despite sharing of many features.” While these problems rather enhance the Bantu Culture Area approach, being conscious of them is important in order to avoid generalization and romanticism.

Second, though the Igbo comprised one of the largest populations of Africans shipped off from the Bight of Biafra entrepôt between the mid-sixteenth century and the 1850s, there is no cohesive African Diaspora community solely constituted by the Igbo. Not even the so-called Maroon communities found in large numbers in the swamps and forests of Surinam, the mountains of Jamaica, and the Brazilian Amazon jungle could claim ethnic homogeneity. Where a precise ethnic identification is possible, as some related studies of the early Igbo communities in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Maryland, and Virginia imply, it is still important to acknowledge that the succeeding descendants of the Igbo ex-slaves have, over the centuries, lost this sense of Igboness.

Third, for individuals who had lived in small village communities, the enslaved Igbos in Americas, with a knack for adaptation, had successfully transformed their village consciousness into a larger Pan-African and transnational/transatlantic identity. Example of the Igbo mentality in the African Diasporas is found with the demeanor exhibited by James Africanus Horton (1835–1883),
the legendary surgeon, intellectual, and African nationalist born of recaptive Igbo parents in Sierra Leone. Christopher Fyfe informs us that while Horton actively identified with his Igbo cultural association in Freetown, he was first and foremost a Pan-Africanist who never desired to go back to the Igbo country.35 This corroborates Michael Gomez’s assertion of a Pan-Africanist ideology as held by the African Diasporas.36 Thus, a comparative examination of the underlying premises of African masks and African Diaspora carnivals promises a rich harvest of culture and ethnohistorical ideas.37 In a broader sense, this inquiry is in agreement with the UNESCO initiative aimed at bridging the gap that “separates the academic study of slavery and the slave trade from a full and general appreciation of the heritage of Africa in the diaspora and the modern world.”38

Chapter Outline

This book consists of eight chapters beyond this introduction. Chapter 1, “On Origins of Masking: History, Memory, and Rituals Observances,” explores the discernment of the early development of masks and masquerades between the prism of religion and ritual abstractions and the ingenuity of physically costuming “spirit beings” for the public theater. In line with the nonlinear principle in which this inquiry is situated, characteristics, forms, and rhythms in both artistic and performance art forms are seen as growing from multiple sources cutting across world regions and timelines. In preindustrial European agrarian communities, for instance, masquerades served as vehicles for social regulation much as they did in precolonial Africa. Also, mindful of the fact that the earliest recorded evidence of masked art forms existed in ancient Egypt, the elevation of abstract notions of spirits to a physical entity in “bodily forms” was first conceived and appropriated in the Igbo/Éfik/Ibibio/Kálábári or Ijọ homelands. Michael Echeruo corroborated this idea in 1981 with the conclusion that “the Igbo will do what the Greek did, expand ritual into life and give that life a secular base.”39 However, Echeruo’s theater-based analysis did not fully capture the strength of Igbo costumed spirit-regarding masquerade invention. In fact, Victor Ukaegbu has aptly argued that because of the uniqueness of the symbolism it connotes, Igbo masking tradition “cannot be squeezed into any other model because of its cultural praxis.”40 In the ensuing discussions, the religious observances, political frameworks, practices of gender, and other values defining the sociopolitical milieu in which the mask and masquerade tradition emanated in the Biafra hinterland area are explained.
Introduction

Chapter 2, “Aspects of Society and Culture in the Biafra Hinterland,” offers a unique laboratory for testing the process of cultural globalization developing from a small corner of the world in West Africa in the Ancient Global Age. A synthesis of ethnographic and anthropological accounts of culture, religion, government, and masquerade plays of the main groups like the Igbo, Èfik, Ibibio, and Ijọ are covered. Also included are the different classifications of African masks and masquerades and their sociopolitical functions. While Abner Cohen defined masquerade “carnival” in its Western understanding as “a season of festive popular events that are characterized by revelry, playfulness, and overindulgence,” Ben Enweonwu reminds us “African art is not really the Western context but an invocation of ancestral spirits through giving concrete form or body to them before they can enter into the human world.” Thus, the functions of African masks and masquerades are analyzed under two classes: (1) “spirit-regarding art” and (2) “man-regarding art.” In the former category, masquerade plays are infused with religious rituals and ideas for social control. The latter art form is the more secular carnival culture that was easily reinvented in the African Diaspora. The result is an illustration of how the practice of masking developed and became entrenched in society as a force of imperial culture par excellence.

Chapter 3, “Bantu Migrations and Cultural Transnationalism in the Ancient Global Age, c. 2500 BCE–1400 CE,” focuses on the Cross River-Igbo masquerade’s travels within the continent. The copious literature on the Bantu details the culture and customs of groups in the Bantu Culture Area. However, it is no longer a secret that these studies are fraught with serious errors and conjectures that often miss the facts. An important corrective in this chapter is that the Cross River Igbo, Èfik, Ibibio, and Ijọ belong to the same linguistic culture and the present areas they occupy are part of the Bantu cradle. The history of the Bantu migration is an inquiry in agent-based modeling—that is a study in the dispersal and spreading of culture across the continent. This excursion on Bantu cultural artifacts reveals that across the continent, diverse aspects of Bantu traditions have been adapted to local needs. Within Africa, masquerade forms such as the Ágábá and Okoroshá masquerade festivals of the Ábáguná, Ífákálá, Umunneohá, Mbieri, Ögwá, and Ubomiri Igbo communities have been adapted even in non-Bantu areas as seen with the masquerade dances of the Bamana, Bozo, and Sòmonò groups in Mali and Guinea. By the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade in the late fifteenth century, the culture of masking (like the spread of agricultural practices, pottery, family traditions, age-grade associations, marriage institution, and metallurgy) had completed its sub-Saharan Africa-wide
journey, thus making it one of the most important forms of sociopolitical mechanisms of religion, identity formation, social control, as well as a mode of artistic/intellectual expression.

Chapter 4, “Bight of Biafra, Slavery, and Diasporic Africa in the Modern Global Age, 1400–1800,” provides an account of the masquerade expansion to the Americas. The centuries of transatlantic slavery (c. 1480–1840s) gave impetus for the slaves to serve as modeling agents in the New World, and the specific nature that masquerade carnivals assumed there is explained as a function of the agents’ culture competencies, structures of power in the Americas, the slaves’ social location, racial and ethnic conglomerations, and competing ideologies. The transformations undergone by African-born masquerade societies like the Êkpè, Kéléké, Ágába, Okoroshá, and Ojionu are illustrated with the Abakuá, Mocko Jumbies, Bamboula, and Jonkonnu. The changes are situated not as a retainer of the African versions but as a coupling of ideas drawn from multiple African nations to fit the needs of the new society.

Chapter 5, “Igbo Masquerade Dances in the African Diasporas: Symbols and Meanings,” uses the Igbo traditions as demarcated in this study to make a potpourri prolegomena exploration of agent-based modeling and cultural diffusion in the development of New World carnival performances. The Caribbean examples are analyzed in light of possible precedents in Africa, without negating the obvious Western European contributions. Previous studies by Miller, Chambers, and Nicholls have established some linkages between the Èfik and Igbo traditional practices with the evolution of Creole culture in the African Diasporas—Cuba, Virginia, Jamaica, the United States, and the Virgin Islands. This chapter attempts to put this historiography in a more nuanced context, with the caveat that elements of Igbo culture found in the African Diasporas also contain dilutions of Èfik, Igbo, Ibibio, Ijo, and other African ethnic traditions. For example, a closer study of the Bamboula dances of Saint Thomas, which an editorial in the Saint Thomas Tidende newspaper of December 28, 1872, repudiated as “a remnant of barbaric Ebo [Igbo] drum,” reveals that it was a diffusion of practices from West and Central Africa, with perhaps more doses of the Kongo and Igbo prototypes. One cannot also discount European and Taino cultural influences. The same pattern of cultural diffusion explains the evolution of the Jonkonnu in Jamaica and Bahamas; the Cuban Abakuá, as a re-creation of the original Êkpè masquerade of the Èfik, Ibibio, Efut, and Quá Ejághám groups of Calabar and the Áró, Ngwá, and Ábíříbá communities of the Igbo. The chapter reiterates that our study of African cultural practices in the New World must be pursued in the realm of “culture areas”—that is, in the
metanarrative of transnationalism, because the frontiers of ideas and practices that emerged in the African Diasporas are dilutions of practices from several parts of Africa and the boundary of cultural inventions spurred the social flux that characterized the slave plantations, the abolition movements it prompted, and the postabolition social reengineering that followed.

Chapter 6, “Unmasking the Masquerade: Counterideologies and Contemporary Practices,” focuses on the various meanings of masks and masquerades and the processes of transformation that include the continuing influences of the Islamic religion starting from medieval times, the transmutations resulting from the transatlantic slave trade, and the enslaved Africans’ deployment of masquerade processions as an instrument of resistance against oppression. The counterpoints reveal the interface among Islamization, Christianization, and colonization of the masquerades in both Africa and in the African Diasporas; the (re)-secularization of the institutions that were in the past exclusively for the initiates; and their intersections with the European culture and its globalization. The nature of the relationship between the two unequal forces (Western and African roots) explains the characteristics masquerade carnivals assumed in the African Diasporas.

Chapter 7, “Idioms of Religion, Music, Dance, and Africana Art Forms,” highlights the integral meanings of the various cultural forms in the lives of people of African descent. It shows that music and dance constitute legitimate spheres of intellectual production. The elder who legitimized the tradition, the artist who carved the mask, the chief priest who infused the art object with sacred powers, the singer who composed the songs and poems for the festivities, and the dancer who moves to the rhythms—all must be understood as producers of texts. Their studied philosophical ideas deserve more than a casual attention; a more insightful interpretation is offered in order to appreciate the unique wisdom and value constructs packaged in the practice of masking. Diverse musical genres and dance forms in both Africa and the African Diasporas are interpreted along with some masquerade songs, incantations, words of wisdom, puzzles, poetries, and proverbs as intellectual expressions.

Chapter 8, “Memory and Masquerade Narratives: The Story of Remembering,” furthers our appreciation of the effectiveness of masquerade carnivals in structuring narrative forms that have, across the centuries, responded and continue to respond to the needs of those societies that created them. Masquerade narratology changes as the society transforms. This dynamism ties into the central argument of this study—that African masks and masquerades may be
prototypes of the African Diaspora genres but the latter need not be judged as a replica or one-on-one retentions of the African mother culture.

In whole, this book offers pristine ideas of how to imagine the rise and spread of African masquerades as a product of clusters of ideas echoing the needs of the societies that produced them. In the modernist praxis, the global detours of African masking style have followed the progression of culture “psychologization”—that is, a process of adaptation of culture to needs and habits of the present. One cannot agree more with Leonard Binder and Joseph La Palombra that “modern culture is self-conscious about functional sequences of its patterns.” Definitely, “the rejection of nonrational symbols has gone hand in hand with the rejection of various forms of group mystique.” Within this dynamism, the African-styled masquerade carnivals have, over time, mutated and adapted to the needs of those that play them.