WHAT IS “AFRICAN” ABOUT AFRICAN MUSIC?

RHYTHMICITY
PERCUSSIVENESS
EMBODIMENT
SPIRITUALITY
SPONTANEITY
COLLECTIVISM

MELODICITY / HARMONICITY
NON-PERCUSSIVENESS
MIND / INTELLECTUALISM
SACRED AND SECULAR SEPARATION
FORMALISM
INDIVIDUALISM
SEARCHING FOR “AFRICA” IN THE DIASPORA

Loss of culture 1939  
Africanisms 1941  
Creolization 1976
THE INVENTION OF AFRICAN RHYTHM

• Ideologies of difference

• We can find true difference only when we assume sameness
THREE APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF BLACK CULTURE

- **Essentialist**
- **Anti-essentialist**
- **Anti-anti-essentialist**
Wakanda [...] function[s] as a place for multiple generations of black Americans to store some of our most deeply held aspirations. We have for centuries sought to either find or create a promised land where we would be untroubled by the criminal horrors of our American existence [...] Never mind that most of us had never been to Africa. The point was not verisimilitude or a precise accounting of Africa’s reality. It was the envisioning of a free self. (Wallace 2018)
FROM AFRICANISMS TO TROPES OF AFRICANNESS

**Two interrelated realms:**

- Discourse
- Practices

**Two premises:**

- Agency and meaning found at the crossroads of discourse and practice
- Follow practitioners
The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (Eltis 2013)
THE “AFRICAN ROME”
“MORE AFRICAN THAN AFRICA”

on the visitors. The late Wyza Kendy (1975–2017), for instance, asserted that he felt at home in Bahia because “Bahia is Africa,” and went as far as to say that “In some regards, Brazil preserves more African rituals than Africa itself.” This affirmation of Bahia’s Africanness by an African individual was music to Bahians’ ears. The news outlet that published Kendy’s statement about Bahia’s superior Africanness concluded: “During the night of the concert, the Africa that both locales preserve will be mixed and will become one, complete, faithful, and original.” These statements suggest that both Bahia and Angola preserve complementary aspects of an “original” Africa: Bahia has preserved Africa’s most traditional and ritualistic aspects and Angola the most modern ones. Bahia is thus
Orkestra Rumpilezz

Orquestra Nzinga de Berimbaus

Orquestra Afrosinfônica

OBADX
Global

Jazz

European Classical Music

Afro-Brazilian

Candomblé Religion

Capoeira

Folk samba

Carnival samba
LETIERES LEITE’S RHYTHMICITY

“My intention is to create a type of music where the resources of Afro-Bahian music are mixed; where the complexity and organization which characterizes their rhythmic systems become clear. It is a work focused on and inspired by percussion and the rhythmic and polyrhythmic universe of Candomblé.”

“All African musics follow a rigorous system of claves. Clave is the smallest rhythmic unit around which these kinds of musics revolve.”
Candomblé ceremony featuring vassi rhythm
Afoxé carnival ensemble featuring ijexá rhythm
DAINHO XEQUERÊ’S MELODICITY

“IN THE SAME WAY THAT PEOPLE IMAGINE AFRICA AS A SMALL COUNTRY FULL OF POOR AND NAKED PEOPLE, THEY ALSO BELIEVE THAT AFRICAN MUSIC IS ONLY DRUMS AND RHYTHM.”

“We want to dispel the myth by showing the connections between the rhythmic, MELODIC, and HARMONIC aspects of African music.”
Example 7.2  Ravel's Bolero performed by OBADX at UFBA's School of Music, 2014.
CONCLUSIONS

• **Tropes are strategically emphasized, downplayed, ignored, traded**

• **Africanness is emergent and contingent but not separated from the trajectory of Africans in the diaspora**

• **Strategic use of Popular/Erudite binary**

• **Familiarity with tropes expands musical diversity and creativity**
Africanness in Action
Essentialism and Musical Imaginations of Africa in Brazil
JUAN DIEGO DIAZ

THANK YOU!