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JUAN DIEGO DÍAZ

The Musical Experience of Diasporas: The Return of a Ghanaian Tabom Master Drummer to Bahia

ABSTRACT: This article studies the construction of transatlantic diasporic identities through musical and religious experience. The case study is of a recent visit to Bahia (Brazil) of the Ghanaian master drummer Eric Odarkwei Morton, a self-declared descendant of freed slaves who resettled from Bahia to West Africa in the nineteenth century. It explores the role of memories, beliefs, expectations, and musical aesthetics during Morton's encounters with local musicians and devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions. I frame Morton's visits to Afro-Brazilian Candomblé worship houses as the encounter of two worlds that idealize each other in their desire to connect with an ancestry rooted at the other side of the Atlantic. I argue that the potential of these encounters to be felt as a confirmation and a celebration of a common ancestry is actualized only in the context of musical experiences in which participants are deeply moved and feel understood.

keywords: Ghanaian Tabom, Afro-Brazilian music, transatlantic identities, musical experience, music and emotion

RESUMO: Este artigo explora a construção de identidades diaspóricas transatlânticas através de experiências musicais e religiosas. O foco é numa recente visita à Bahia (Brasil) do mestre percussionista ganês Eric Odarkwei Morton, um descendente de escravos libertos que migraram da Bahia para a África Ocidental no século XIX. O artigo explora o papel das memórias, crenças, expectativas e estética musical durante os seus encontros com músicos locais e devotos da religião afro-brasileira Candomblé. Eu enquadro as visitas de Morton às casas de culto de Candomblé como o encontro de dois mundos que se idealizam mutuamente em seu desejo de se conectar com uma ancestralidade enraizada no lado oposto do Atlântico. Argumento que o potencial destes encontros serem entendidos como confirmações e celebrações de ancestralidades compartilhadas só se concretiza por medio de experiencias musicais intensas aonde os participantes se sentem profundamente comovidos e entendidos.

palavras chave: Tabom Ganês, música afro-brasileira, identidades transatlânticas, experiência musical, música e emoção

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Diasporas are not the inevitable consequence of migration, but rather a state of awareness of separation from an ancestral land shaped by a history of relocation that results in a claim and condition asserted by practices such as music and celebrations. People may thus acquire, reject, reassert, or disregard the condition. The African diaspora is a case in point. More than twelve million sub-Saharan Africans were forcibly sent to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade; many retained emotional links with the land they left behind, others did not. Subsequently, millions of their descendants have found in Africa a renewed source of pride and unity, even among those who have never been there. Some have returned to places like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia in a movement known as "Back to Africa." But their diasporic journey is not necessarily complete: the return may generate new diasporic attachments for returnees and their descendants, linked to places across the Atlantic. These new attachments have prompted some returnees and their descendants to continue traversing the Atlantic to visit the New World communities their ancestors left behind. These movements thus endlessly complicate their diasporic condition. This article discusses the complexities of people's diasporic condition in the black Atlantic during a recent encounter between a Ghanaian master drummer and various black musicians and religious leaders in the Brazilian state of Bahia.

In July 2016, the Ghanaian master drummer Eric Odarkwei Morton accomplished a long-held desire to visit Bahia. Morton is a fifth-generation Tabom (as the community of Brazilian returnee-descendants is known in Ghana) from Accra who claims to be a descendant of the Brazilian returnee João Antonio Nelson (a.k.a. Nii Alasha Nelson, b. Bahia, ca. 1826; d. Accra, 1900). As a master drummer, Morton plays a key role in his community, presiding over ceremonies that the Tabom use to maintain and celebrate their Brazilian heritage.[1] For him, the visit was a unique opportunity to reconnect with the land of the founders of his community, who reportedly arrived in Accra in the 1830s. This reconnection is crucial for Morton and his people because Brazilian ancestry defines their collective identity. The trip was thus charged with expectations to validate and renew Brazilian references and to establish enduring relationships with his "Brazilian relatives."

Morton's visit to Bahia is the most recent episode of an ongoing transatlantic saga that is fundamental to his group's identity. The Tabom are part of a larger set of communities founded by African and Creole freed slaves who resettled from Brazil to West Africa throughout the nineteenth century. In adapting to their new realities, returnees formed communities with distinct Afro-Brazilian identities that are known today as Tabom in Ghana, Brésiliens in Togo, Agudas in Benin, and Amaros in Nigeria. Although most no longer speak Portuguese and have never set foot in Brazil,

they are keen to maintain and strengthen their Brazilian heritage through memories and practices. Tabom history is thus marked by three stages of transatlantic migration: involuntary repatriation from various parts of Africa to Brazil, reverse migration back to West Africa, and actual and desired visits to Brazil by the descendants of returnees.

I organized the trip with the support of the Brazilian embassy in Accra. The goal was to actualize the Tabom's knowledge of Bahia by exposing a key member of their community such as Morton to Afro-Bahian culture through encounters with black activists, practitioners of *capoeira* and Candomblé religion,[2] and carnival and popular musicians. On his return to Ghana he would share his experience with his fellow Tabom. The Brazilian filmmaker Nilton Pereira and I accompanied Morton on his journey and created a documentary to help him amplify his story (Díaz and Pereira 2017).

Following Morton's travels in Bahia, this article discusses how the Tabom assert their diasporic condition and construct a transatlantic identity by engaging in musical and religious practices from Brazil or perceived by his community as Brazilian. It analyzes Morton's encounters in light of the prevalent interpretations of Africa and Brazil that he and his Bahian counterparts brought with them, as well as aspects of their historical, religious, and aesthetic backgrounds. Morton's most meaningful encounters took place inside Candomblé shrines, where he found grooves, songs, practices, and symbols similar to those that he and other Tabom associate with Brazil. I frame these encounters as the convergence of two worlds that idealize each other in their desire to connect with an ancestry rooted at the other side of the Atlantic. Unsurprisingly, both parties looked for and emphasized what was shared and had expectations around reaching some level of mutual understanding despite their geographical, cultural, and linguistic differences. In my participant-observer capacity, I noticed that some of these encounters were even interpreted as confirmations of core beliefs and narratives about their ancestral relations and diasporic identity. The confirmation of their belief in a common ancestry is particularly important for Morton and the Afro-Bahians he met because they respectively use Brazil and Africa as markers of difference in constructing their ethnic identities. A reaffirmation of a shared ancestry also has the potential to trigger ethnic pride, a fulfilled sense of belonging, and feelings of self-respect and dignity against the backdrop of historical marginalization and discrimination of Afro-Bahians in Brazil and the Tabom population in Ghana.[3] I argue that the potential of these encounters to be felt as a confirmation and a celebration of common ancestry and to trigger ethnic pride and other positive feelings is actualized *only* in the context of musical experiences in which participants are deeply moved and feel understood. A powerful field of sound, emotion, and imagination is activated

when narratives and beliefs about ancestry and identity are evoked in conjunction with an intense musical experience. This field affirms and celebrates the relationships between participants and materializes identities that are often largely based on discourse. By focusing on experience and musical embodiment, this article takes a phenomenological approach, one that draws mainly on my observations in the field and on the writings of Christopher Small, Anne Danielsen, Kwabena Nketia, and Steve Friedson.

Data were gathered ethnographically in two phases: first, during a year that I spent in Accra while studying Tabom musical and religious practices under Morton's instruction (2015–2016), and second, during Morton's trip to Bahia on July 12–31, 2016, when I acted as his translator and trip organizer. I analyze some of his musical and religious encounters, with particular attention to the rhetoric, musical material, performance practices, and embodied responses at play against the backdrop of discourses of Africanness and Brazilianness.

This article situates the role of musical and religious practices, experiences, and expectations as well as oral memory through and within the black Atlantic. Two stages of transatlantic migration are relevant for this study: the return of Africans and Creoles to Africa and, especially, the visits of their descendants to the Americas. Although there are numerous studies, most of a historical nature, on the former stage (Jenkins 1975; Verger 1976; Cunha 1985; Saracino 1988; Guran 2000; Mann and Bay 2001; Barnes 2004; Law 2004; Lovejoy and Curto 2004; Prah 2009; Essien 2016), only a handful of authors have focused on the latter. Among them, some have documented the challenges that returnees faced during the early stages of settlement in West Africa and how these compelled the reverse journey of some back to Brazil (Essien 2016). Others have shown that some returnees traveled back and forth between Bahia and West Africa while engaging in transatlantic commercial activities (Turner 1942; Lindsay 1994) or transporting religious objects and knowledge (Landes 1947; Verger 1976; Matory 2005). Most of these documented exchanges took place between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More recently, Paulina Alberto (2011) studied the political implications of the visit of a member of the Nigerian Amaro community to Brazil in the 1960s, and Kwame Essien (2016) discussed the visit of one Tabom to Brasília in 2008 in the context of a diplomatic mission.[4] Essien argues that the Tabom's yearnings for Brazil reflect a view of that country as their motherland, while Ghana remains their home, an argument that I share. My study also shares Essien's (2016, xxxv) larger goal of understanding how the Tabom "remembered, forgot, ignored, performed, and negotiated their ties to both Ghana and Brazil at different times and in different circumstances." By focusing on firsthand accounts of Morton's musical and religious experiences in Bahia, this study, however, offers new

perspectives to our understandings of returns to Latin America in the construction and negotiation of transatlantic identities. It places the role of musical experience as central to the assertion of the diasporic condition.

The opening section explains my framework for the study of musical experience. This is followed by a brief historical overview of the Tabom, an introduction to *agbe*, their only distinct musical style, and a discussion of Africa's place in the Brazilian imaginary. The following section discusses Morton's key experiences in Bahia, including singing, drumming, and spiritual encounters. To conclude, I synthesize the circumstances that facilitated a successful encounter between Morton and Candomblé practitioners.

On the Study of Musical Experience

The article's main contention is that people's diasporic condition needs to be rooted in some kind of experience—musical, in the cases I am documenting—not just in discourse. Christopher Small (1995, 4) has written that the act of participating in a musical performance in any capacity (e.g., playing, listening, dancing, trancing) has the potential to "empower us to experience the actual structure of our universe, and in experiencing it we learn, not just intellectually, but in the very depths of our existence, what our place is within it and how we relate, and ought to relate, to it. We explore those relationships, we affirm them and we celebrate them, every time we take part in a musical performance." However, not every musical experience succeeds in affirming and celebrating the ideal relationships among participants, as Small claims. Often a concrete musical connection and mutual understanding (e.g., locking into a tight groove collectively created, singing together harmoniously), accompanied by an intense emotional response (e.g., being moved to tears; feeling thrills, chills, or an urge to move), must take place in order to ground narratives and discourse, especially when the participants *expect* those musical connections to happen. It is clear that musical understanding and intense emotional responses to music do not necessarily imply a corroboration of a belief in a shared ancestry: people may connect musically and emotionally but not discursively. The point is that a discourse of shared ancestry, like that of Morton and his Bahian counterparts, is amplified and grounded when embodied in an experience of harmonious connection; music is an ideal medium for those connections to happen.

Notice that several authors have also posited music as a central expression among black Atlantic communities. For Paul Gilroy (1993, 73), music is special because it allows the expression of the unsayable, particularly the "unspeakable terrors of the slave experience" and the identity dilemma inherent to black double consciousness. Ingrid Monson (2000,

2) has argued that music has the "ability to coordinate several culturally valued modes of expression, including song, verbal recitation, dance, religious worship, drama, and visual display." And for Samuel Floyd (1995) and Clarence Henry (2008), music accompanied the survival of African spirituality in the Americas, which they see as containing a purported African essence. As do these authors, I place music at the center of African diasporic expression, but for a different reason: music provides fertile soil for the emergence of experiences in which musical sound, emotion, and discourse about ancestry may converge and reinforce one another.

Numerous authors have documented the importance of experience when studying music in relation to social processes in sub-Saharan Africa and its Atlantic diaspora. Drawing on Heidegger's phenomenological notions of "being-in-the-world" and "being and time," Anne Danielsen (2006), for instance, proposed the notion of "being in the groove" as a key concept for understanding the relationship between sound, emotion, and collectivism in US African American funk grooves. She argues that, in this state, musicians and dancers experience time in such a way that they feel more present in the here and now and that this type of experience may work as "a means of spiritual upheaval, of achieving strength and pride" (204). She also explains that US African American funk dancers in the 1970s connected groove-derived pleasure to black pride, an ethno-racial form of celebration politically and historically grounded in the United States but connected with other localities in the diaspora (204). Because many of the events in which Morton participated featured groove-based musics (e.g., Candomblé, *samba*, *capoeira*, *agbe*), Danielsen's notion of being in the groove is relevant to the study of the dynamics of musical participation in relation to claims about ethnic pride and diasporic identity. Being in the groove is thus a particular way of musicking in which musicians connect with and understand one another rhythmically while creating a tight groove.

Moving to discussion of the African continent, Steve Friedson's (1996) study of healing practices among the Malawian Tumbuka people places musical experience as "the structural nexus where healer, patient, and spirit meet" (xvi) and as "the energizing heat that fuels the divination trance, transforming both the bodily and social functioning of the individual" (12). Music's ability to facilitate trance in religious and healing contexts is well documented across the world (Rouget 1985; Becker 2004). Morton's Ghana is no exception. In "The Intensity Factor of African Music," for instance, the late Kwabena Nketia (1988, 55) argued that, in musical performances, intense embodied responses to music (e.g., energetic dance or spirit possession) are clear signs of its success. The intensity factor refers to "the depth of feeling stimulated by the music" and "success" to instances in which music is perceived as beautiful, convincing, and effective

in ritual settings. He first analyzes this in the context of religious ceremonies among the Ga people in Ghana (in which Morton is immersed), and then expands it to secular settings. For him, this aesthetic operates in larger parts of the African continent (notice the article's title) and even in the Cuban and Brazilian diaspora (58)—the latter diasporic cases being well documented since the early twentieth century (Ortiz 1940; Herskovits 1944). Elsewhere I have argued that Candomblé devotees in Bahia value music largely for its ability to move them emotionally, specifically to bring them to near-trance states, and that this aesthetic applies to ritual and nonritual contexts as well as to other Afro-Bahian styles such as *capoeira* (Díaz 2016a). Given Morton's immersion in Ga religious and healing practices, and because all the musicians he met in Bahia are, in one way or another, involved in the religious world of Candomblé, an aesthetic that values intense emotional responses to music is key to understanding their experience during musical encounters.

My analysis examines various ways in which participants express embodied responses to musical experience, ranging from verbal and facial expressions, to bodily gestures, to falling into trance. When possible, these are contextualized with the participants' own reflections on their experience. It is important to point out that the participants' experience and the ways they make sense of them do not always align. As we will see, what means proof of African musical survival for some may mean connection with ancestral spirits for others. However, regardless of the differences, the intensity of their experiences and the ways they expressed themselves fed into and amplified each other's experience. In my interpretation of these encounters I thus connect my firsthand observations and reactions to their experiences with the musical materials and performance practices at play, and contextualize them with participants' aesthetic backgrounds, positionalities, and narratives about ancestry, as well as with scholarly historical accounts.

Faithful to my phenomenological approach, I let my senses and experience guide my inquiry. My complicated role as ethnographer, documentary producer, trip organizer, translator, and musician, however, demanded attentional shifts that shaped my experience during encounters: I would typically alternate between translating and playing an instrument in a polyrhythmic ensemble (under strict instruction of the participants) while also negotiating logistics with our film crew. However, I often found myself matching the other participants' embodied responses—I did not fall into trance as some did, but I frequently shed tears, laughed, or felt goose bumps when they did. In other words, I felt and sometimes cocreated the moments of intense embodied experiences, which served as initial indicators of the materialization of their narratives about shared ancestry. Most of the musicians Morton met were my Bahian music teachers and friends

whom I had known through a decade of research on Afro-Bahian music. I was thus familiar with the Bahian and Ghanaian genres they played, which gave me insight for analysis and interpretation. Finally, the presence of our film crew also complicated things, as participants made extra efforts to appear in the film as well connected as possible. The extent to which this enhanced or undermined their actual experiences is unclear, but it certainly played a role. Featuring fragments of most of the examined encounters, the documentary *Tabom in Bahia* provides vivid images and sounds that will help readers have their own experiences and reactions to these encounters and contextualize my analyses.

Historical Overview

The history of the Tabom is one of many histories of forced displacement, adaptation, and longing for ancestral connection in the black Atlantic.[5] This history begins with the nearly five million people who were enslaved and forcibly sent from Africa to Brazil between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to David Eltis (2013), around 1.5 million of these arrived in the state of Bahia, where the first colonial capital of Brazil was located (1549–1763) and an important agricultural center at the time. The decline of the Oyo Empire in present-day western Nigeria and eastern Benin by the end of the eighteenth century resulted in the massive enslavement of Yoruba-speaking people and the deportation of many to the Americas. From this moment (ca. 1800) until the end of the slave trade in 1850, Eltis estimates that some two hundred thousand enslaved people arrived in Bahia from the Bight of Benin, many of them Yoruba.[6] These arrivals drastically changed the ethnic composition of Bahia's black population, with some writers claiming that, from the 1820s until the end of the nineteenth century, Yoruba was Bahia's lingua franca among Africans and their descendants (Parés 2004, 188). Yorubas led intense campaigns of resistance against the Portuguese and Brazilian royal authorities, including a series of rebellions from the 1790s through the Malê Revolt in 1835. The Malê Revolt, in which many Muslim Yorubas participated, was harshly suppressed, and the ensuing wave of repression made the lives of many Africans and Creoles unbearable.[7] This was a major motivation for the return to West Africa. But although many desired to return, only a small group of comparatively wealthy freed slaves could afford the crossing (Parés and Castillo 2015). In sum, even though returnees resettled in West Africa throughout the nineteenth century, the major wave of return occurred immediately after the 1835 Malê Revolt, and most of those who arrived in Accra were likely part of this group.

Many of the returnees to Accra thus practiced Islam, spoke Portuguese and Yoruba, and were freed slaves. Essien (2016) has written that the first

Tabom ancestors may have arrived in Accra in the late 1820s and subsequently in various stages up to the 1860s. However, most Tabom accounts identify 1836 as the initial date of arrival. Tabom narratives mention cases of direct arrival from Bahia, and others include an intermediate stay in Lagos of unknown duration. Both trajectories have been documented (Amos and Ayesu 2002; Essien 2016). Many Tabom identity markers—such as belief in Shango, the practice of *agbe* music, and distinct funerary rites—reflect a Yoruba influence that can be traced to the returnees' experience in Bahia, a detour in Lagos, or post-arrival exchanges with Yoruba speakers in Lagos and Accra.[8]

The returnees to Dutch-, British-, and Danish-dominated Accra settled with the Ga people. Authors and my interlocutors speak about the friendly attitude of the Ga toward the newcomers and how this facilitated their eventual integration into this ethnic group.[9] Most Tabom adopted Ga cultural traits, including food, religion, rituals, celebrations, dressing styles, and most notably the Ga language, which is now the mother tongue of most. However, they have retained and reinvented practices that connect them with their Brazilian ancestry, including cooking styles, music, dance, and religious and funerary rites. The historical presence of the Akan in Accra has also influenced the Tabom. Today most Tabom also speak Twi—a widespread Akan language—and are familiar with Akan court musical styles such as *adenkun*, *mpintim*, and *asafo*.

Since 1961, when Brazil opened its first embassy in Ghana, the Tabom have actively engaged Brazilian diplomats to gain recognition and support for the maintenance of their Brazilian heritage. Their relationship with the Brazilian government thrived during two periods when Brazilian foreign policy focused on Africa. The first was between 1961 and 1964 under the governments of Jânio Quadros and João Goulart, and the second began with President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva in 2002 and extended until the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. The Tabom met Lula during his three visits to Ghana in 2005, 2007, and 2013. Lula made a strong impression in the community during these encounters through official pronouncements that emphasized a historical debt that Brazil owes to Africa, and his name is currently mentioned in friendly terms in Tabom public ceremonies and in interviews. In their first encounter in 2005, the Tabom gave Lula the honorary title of Tabom chief while voicing (as they usually do in the presence of Brazilian officials) their desire to visit their "Brazilian relatives" in Bahia. Lula responded by providing funds to renovate a historical building and by inviting the Tabom chief to Brazil. The visit was postponed and ultimately canceled in 2006 as a result of logistical issues (Essien 2010, 314–315; Díaz 2016b, 120–123). The chief and other Tabom still remember the occasion and continue to wait for a Brazilian initiative inviting them to Bahia.[10]



FIGURE 1. Agbe *percussion ensemble, Accra, 2014. Photo by Ben Amakye-Boateng.*

Agbe

Most Tabom are familiar with various musical styles from the Ga and Akan groups; however, *agbe* is their only distinct musical genre. *Agbe* appears in social contexts such as weddings, outdoorings (a traditional ceremony when a baby is brought outside for the first time), religious and healing rituals, and, most often, funerals. In many ways, *agbe* resembles typical West African drumming ensemble performance: it features polyrhythmic drumming, dancing, and responsorial songs.[11] What makes *agbe* unique is that the songs are in Yoruba, a language not spoken in Tabom quotidian life. Songs in Yoruba speak to the Tabom history of arrival in Accra via Lagos, but also to the widespread use of Yoruba in Bahia at the time of the Tabom ancestors' return to Africa and to the presence of Yoruba speakers in Accra throughout the nineteenth century. It is noteworthy that the Tabom have retained songs in that language instead of Portuguese, a language that most Tabom acknowledge as "the language of our Brazilian ancestors."[12] This sets Tabom music apart from that of other Brazilian returnees in Togo, Benin, and Nigeria, where songs in Portuguese have survived phonetically (Verger 1976; Guran 2000; De Athayde 2018).

As shown in Figure 1, the *agbe* ensemble includes two double-headed cylindrical drums called *agbe*, similar to the Dagbamba *brekete* drums or the *dundun* drums of Senegambian djembe ensembles, one leading and one supporting. A double-mouthed bell similar to the Ewe *gankogui*, called

agogô, plays a timeline pattern that functions as a temporal organizer for the ensemble, and various *shekeres* (rattles formed by a gourd covered by a net of beads) accompany.

As a master drummer, Eric Morton oversees performances by pouring libations, leading responsorial songs, and, more generally, controlling the flow of the music and dance. Songs thematize Tabom narratives, symbols, and values. The song "Dabi beru agbe" (Musical Example 1), for instance, places the origins of *agbe* in Ijesha, a location in southwest Nigeria, echoing the narrative of the returnees' stopover in Lagos:[13]

Soloist: Dabi beru agbe, kim be wa jo	We started playing the *agbe* dance
Choir: Yee!, dabi beru agbe, kim be wa jo	So, we invite you to come and dance
Soloist: Eba beru Ijesha koni bagbe	Ask in Ijesha and you won't forget that
Choir: Yee!, dabi beru agbe, kim be wa jo	This is where the dance comes from

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 1. Agbe *song "Dabi beru agbe." Musical transcription by the author; phonetic spelling reflects Morton's rendition; translation by Salomon Armah.*



An *agbe* performance in the context of a funeral celebration is structured in three main sections. After an introduction including a series of drum phrases, a collective prayer, and an opening song comes the *agbe* proper, which is the lengthiest section, featuring the *agbe* groove in a compound meter of 12/8 and a series of songs, each typically accompanying one dancer and closing with a full stop. This section is organized by a timeline identical to the so-called West African standard pattern [x.x.xx.x.x.x] and, being the section that characterizes the style, it is reproduced in all



FIGURE 2. *Mural depicting Shango at a historic Tabom building in Accra. Courtesy of Brazilian Embassy in Ghana.*

celebrations that are not funerals. Last comes the *viva viva* section featuring a sequence of four songs and a groove in 4/4 meter and organized around a timeline similar to that of the *kpatsa* dance of the Ga people, [x.x.x.x.x..x.x..]. In this section the Tabom symbolically "send the spirit of the deceased back to Brazil, the land of their ancestors."[14] Women dance in a circle around an actual or imaginary coffin, each placing an object on the top of her head to symbolize lightening the burden of the deceased on their last journey.

Agbe is also used to praise Shango, a Yoruba deity originally from southwestern Nigeria who was disseminated across the Atlantic from the late eighteenth century onward with the enslavement and shipment of thousands of Shango believers to the Americas. Currently Shango is worshipped in Nigeria, other places in West Africa, and the African diaspora, particularly Cuba, Brazil, and Trinidad. Like other Orisha cults, Shango's has local variations, but it is generally framed in elaborate ceremonies where polyrhythmic drumming and responsorial songs accompany dance and facilitate spirit possession—that is, the manifestation of Shango in the bodies of initiates. Many Tabom believe that Shango came from Bahia with the returnees. Although there is no historical documentation of this arrival, the claim is plausible, as Shango was widely worshipped in Bahia by the time most returnees crossed the Atlantic eastward.[15] Today most Tabom, including Morton, are Christians, but many still believe that Shango can bring

good fortune, cure ailments, and offer protection if the correct offerings and rituals are performed. To this end, they have created a Shango shrine, which is administered by a priestess. In 2014 Lekia Nelson, the current priestess, was initiated and *agbe* was used to accompany parts of the ceremony, including moments of possession. In fact, for some Tabom the link of *agbe* with Shango is more encompassing than its ritual use in ceremonies for the deity. Eric Morton, for instance, believes that "every *agbe* sound is for Shango."[16]

"Africa" in the Bahian Imaginary

The state of Bahia in the Brazilian Northeast has one of the highest concentrations of African descendants in Brazil and is an epicenter of black culture in the Atlantic basin.[17] Bahia was one of the main points of arrival for enslaved Africans in Brazil, and a large proportion of them remained in this state, satisfying a local demand for labor on sugarcane plantations and ultimately laying the foundations of Afro-Bahian culture.[18] Despite the strong repression they suffered during Brazil's period as a Portuguese colony (ca. 1500–1822), the Brazilian Empire (1822–1889), and subsequent Republican governments, Afro-Bahians have publicly celebrated their culture at least since the late nineteenth century, when blacks first paraded in the streets showcasing African-inspired music, dance, and attire.[19] This practice took on larger dimensions during the 1970s, when a wave of African revival in Bahia brought together musicians and activists from the black consciousness movement. Carnival ensembles, *capoeira* and *samba* groups, and Candomblé worship houses became politically conscious, with various groups like Ilê Aiyê taking inspiration from the Black Power Movement's slogans of black pride and black beauty. More crucially, they also took African symbols and practices as a source of inspiration.

Livio Sansone (2004) and Patricia de Santana Pinho (2010) explain that "Africa" provides a common narrative that connects black communities across the Atlantic to an actual or imaginary past and that symbols and traits held as being of "African" origin are often creatively adapted to create cultural products that validate a common African ancestry and a black identity. These views of Africa are commonplace in Bahia among practitioners of Afro-Bahian music styles and Candomblé religion.

Candomblé religion is at the top of the rank of perceived Africanness in Bahia because it is the diasporic expression in which African traits are believed to have survived in their purest form (Herskovits 1941; Díaz 2016a; Sansone 2004). Candomblé songs in various African languages that are no longer spoken in daily life are often used as the definitive proof of their retention, and despite its syncretic nature, the entire aesthetics of a Candomblé ceremony, including polyrhythmic drumming, responsorial

songs, dance, ritual possession, and African deities, are commonly associated with specific African lineages. As a consequence, many of the stereotypical notions of musical Africanness held by Bahians are based on Candomblé aesthetics. These notions include the idea that African-derived musics are mainly rhythmic, percussive, deeply embodied, and always touching on the spiritual (for a fuller discussion of these notions, see Agawu 2003; Díaz 2014). Clearly, taking Candomblé or other Afro-diasporic religions as models to assess African purity is problematic, as it relies on the assumption of the survival of an aboriginal African past in the Americas (Matory 2005; Palmié 2013). As Clarke (2004) and Palmié (2008) have argued, during discussions of African authenticity it is more important to ask "Whose 'Africa' is 'Africa'?" The "Africa" of the Bahians whom Morton met is not necessarily the Africa where he lives today, with its modern urban sounds, streets, and buildings. Rather, it is one shaped, on the one hand, by a history of forced relocations, slavery, marginalization, and racism in Bahia, and, on the other hand, by a tradition of celebration of black culture in which idealized notions of Africa function as symbols of pride. Candomblé is instrumental in this view because it embodies these idealized notions. This was the lens through which many Afro-Bahians saw Morton during his visit to Bahia.

The Trip

Before our trip to Bahia, Morton insisted on visiting the Tabom Shango priestess. During our visit Morton asked Shango what to expect during the journey, and the deity, incarnated in the priestess, reassured him by saying, "All the paths are open for you." This assurance would remain with Morton throughout the trip. We arrived in Salvador, Bahia, on July 12, 2016, and stayed for three weeks. The itinerary was packed. Morton participated in lecture demonstrations, led workshops on *agbe*, and met black activists, civil servants, and musicians versed in Afro-Bahian musical styles. We visited Candomblé shrines of the three major traditions (Nagô, related to the Yoruba; Jeje, related to the Ewe- and Fon-speaking peoples from Benin, Togo, and Ghana; and Angola, connected to the Kikongo- and Kimbundu-speaking peoples of present-day Congo and Angola) in Salvador and other two Bahian cities, Santo Amaro da Purificação and Cachoeira.

Singing

During Morton's musical encounters in Bahia, his musicality stood out, especially while he was singing. He used his ability to listen to and match song lyrics in languages that he does not speak in various situations. Sometimes he did it with remarkable accuracy. One example was in an

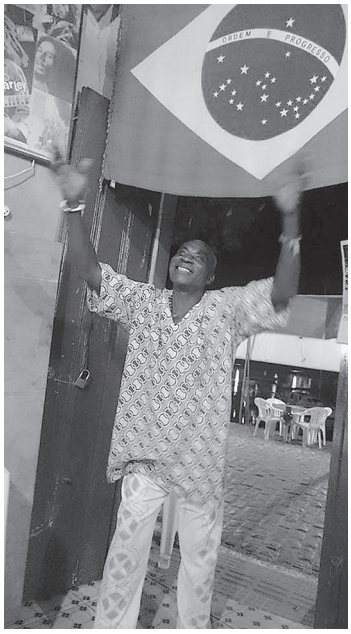
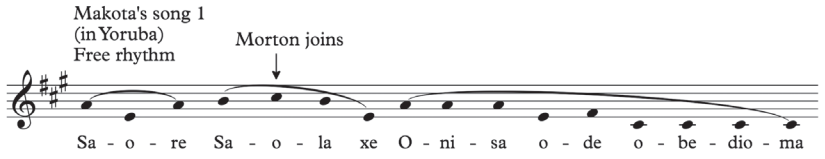


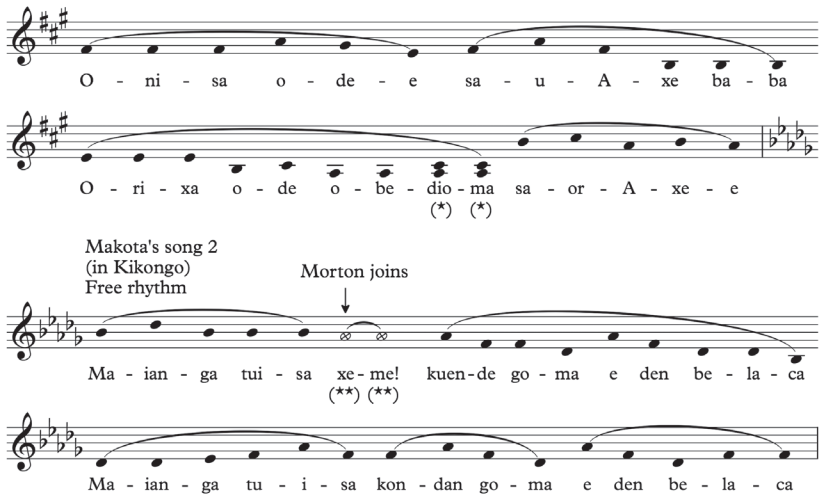
FIGURE 3. *Eric Morton in Cachoeira, Bahia. Photo by Nilton Pereira.*

encounter with the late Valdina Pinto de Oliveira (a.k.a. Makota Valdina), a well-known black activist, author, and spiritual leader of a Candomblé house of the Angola tradition in Salvador. After a long conversation in which Valdina and Morton shared parts of their life stories and spoke about the importance of Africa-Brazil connections in their lives, Valdina offered two farewell songs to Morton, one in Yoruba and another one in Kikongo (one of the ritual languages used in Angola Candomblé shrines). In both cases, after a few seconds of focused listening, Morton matched Valdina's words, melody, and rhythm with such precision that she and the rest of us believed that he *knew* the songs.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 2. *Traditional Candomblé songs sung by Makota Valdina during her encounter with Eric Morton (Salvador, July 20, 2016). Musical and phonetic transcriptions by the author. *Eric Morton sings the upper notes (C♯). **Unpitched notes.*



MUSICAL EXAMPLE 2. *(continued)*



The experience was highly emotional and gratifying for Valdina, as it reinforced a sense of connection with her African ancestry.[20] She explained the event as "an ancestral connection," which by extension suggests that Morton and his fellow Tabom have not forgotten what their ancestors learned in Bahia and brought to Ghana, and that she and other Afro-Brazilians have not forgotten what those who came from Africa brought with them.

Afterward I asked Morton if he knew the songs that Valdina offered to him; he said that he did not but that the songs simply "came" to him. Morton believes that he has a special relationship with music that manifests itself in an ability to quickly memorize and reproduce rhythms and songs, and to access songs through spiritual means. He claims that he was invested with the title of *Agbetse* (*agbe* chief in Ga) in his community because of this musical sensibility. He and other Tabom believe that *agbe* songs can "come to you" spontaneously if you are in the right setting and state of mind. For instance, possessed by Shango during her 2014 initiation, the Tabom Shango priestess sang songs that the community believes she had never heard before. For Morton, songs "came to her" and this was the work of Shango.

Obviously, songs can "come to you" more easily when you have a certain stylistic familiarity. Let us explore this familiarity in linguistic, rhythmic, and melodic terms. As mentioned earlier, the first song Valdina offered to Morton was in Yoruba, the language of the *agbe* songs that he knows.

Neither Morton nor Valdina speaks Yoruba, but they share a basic knowledge of ritual terms such as *Ọlọrun* (god), *Òrìṣà* (deity), *Àsé* (innate power of all beings and things), *Ìyá* (mother), *Baba* (father), and others, which appear in ritual songs on both sides of the Atlantic.[21] It is thus possible that Morton recognized common terms in Valdina's song and that this accounts for his phonetic accuracy while singing with her. However, Morton matched the text pronunciation in the second song in Kikongo (a language of the Bantu family, unknown to him) with similar accuracy. Clearly, he has a particular facility for hearing text in languages he does not know and matching it. He may have acquired this ability in the highly multilingual context of Accra—the city he grew up in—where it is common for children to learn to speak various languages by mere exposure. Morton is fluent in Ga, Twi, and English, and he can "hear" (understand but not speak) a fair amount of Fanti and Hausa.

Typically, songs in Candomblé and *agbe* public ceremonies are accompanied by a percussive groove in either simple or compound meter. However, Valdina sang the two songs a cappella and in free rhythm, as some soloists do in preparatory offerings before public ceremonies. Valdina's conversational style is akin to the speech style used while pouring libations, a form of asking for protection and permission to deities and ancestors through prayers that is common not only in *agbe* ceremonies but also in most rituals in Ghana. The person who pours libations leads the prayer with phrases in free rhythm while the rest respond with expressions such as "Ame" (I am listening) and match certain words of the prayer leader. This demands careful listening to text, rhythm, and inflection on the part of listeners, which may also account for Morton's accuracy in matching Valdina's rhythm. This was also facilitated by her slow pace: the forty-two syllables of the first song lasted thirty seconds, and the thirty-one syllables of the second one, twenty seconds.

Melodically, Valdina's songs are both major pentatonic (with one exception in the first song, the fifth note of the second system in Musical Example 2), tend to feature descending contours, have ranges of an octave and a tenth, respectively, and move in diatonic intervals mainly consisting of thirds (in the second song) and seconds and fourths (in the first song). All these features are familiar to Morton. Take for instance "Iyalode," a song used in *agbe* to salute prominent women that Morton dedicated to Valdina in response to her song offerings. As shown in Musical Example 3, the melody uses pitches of a major pentatonic scale; moves in seconds, thirds, and fourths; and has a range of a seventh; and most of its phrases have descending contours. These features are present in many other *agbe* songs. This familiarity thus partially accounts for Morton's precise melodic matching of Valdina's songs.

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3. Agbe *song "Iyalode" sung by Eric Morton during his encounter with Makota Valdina (Salvador, July 20, 2016). Musical and phonetic transcription by the author.*



Morton was satisfied with the experience, but he did not interpret it primarily as the result of an ancestral connection. For him, it was a natural result of his musicality and of his connection with Shango. The experience was reassuring for Morton because of Valdina's positive emotional response to his display of musicality, expressed with bewilderment, smiles, hugs, tears, and other gestures of approval. Equally important, through this experience he was able to connect with a deity that protects him and that he associates with his Brazilian ancestry. The musical encounter became evidence of a religious presence that confirmed his Brazilianness and his Tabomness.

But by interpreting this event merely as an "ancestral connection," Valdina minimized Morton's musicality and treated him as a token. After singing the second song with Morton—which is in Kikongo, a language that she *knows* is from a different linguistic area from Morton's Ghana[22]—she said, "Oh he knows! My God. This is very good for me. To sing and [to see] the African understanding. . . . This [kind of experience] is what is good for us. This is Brazilian black identity!" While uttering the last sentence Valdina slapped her chest twice—a clear sign of pride. Morton became a generic representation of an idealized Africa that served her to affirm and celebrate her African ancestry and to assert her diasporic condition. This was one of various encounters in which Morton's singing provoked this kind of reaction and interpretation.

At a lecture demonstration at the Federal University of Bahia (abbreviated in Portuguese as UFBA) in which Morton and two US African American *iyalorixás* (priestesses in the Yoruba tradition) were invited to speak

about religious and musical diasporic connections across the Atlantic, one of the priestesses sang in Yoruba a song for Orixá Oxum (the Yoruba goddess of beauty and fresh water). After hearing a segment of the song (the presentation of a theme that was later repeated), Morton joined her clearly, loudly, and confidently to the astonishment of an audience of some fifty people. Scholars and Candomblé and *capoeira* practitioners who were present commented on and celebrated the "power of ancestral connection." In the words of one *capoeira* master who was present, "There was an ancestral message that she passed to Morton. There is no need to translate or to know the meaning of the words." The priestess who sang with Morton said, "It was our ancestors that we connected with."

This experience resembles the encounter with Valdina but has a collective dimension. The kind of connection that Valdina and Morton felt was, this time, shared with an attentive audience that held similar beliefs of a shared ancestry between Africa and Bahia. The experience of the witnesses did not involve direct musical participation and the type of embodiment it entails, but their reactions verify Small's claim that sometimes it suffices to be present at a musical performance in order to participate in the potential sense of community that it can generate. The witnesses' ideas about the ideal relationship between the participants in this musical event (the two singers and themselves), a shared African ancestry, were confirmed when Morton sang with the priestess. In Small's (1995, 4) words, the participants "experienced the actual structure of their universe" while affirming and celebrating what their place was within it, and their reactions (smiles, verbal expressions of amazement, and clapping) amplified Morton's positive experience.

The idea of a Bahia-Ghana connection via Yoruba songs was reinforced and put into larger perspective when the *capoeira* master mentioned earlier compared this event to another occasion when he had played a recording of an Orisha song in Yoruba by a Cuban *santero* to a Brazilian Candomblé priestess.[23] He explained: "When she heard him singing, she immediately accompanied him with her voice. Like tonight, a song was able to reestablish an ancestral bond. It's incredible. . . . And it all happened naturally. Nothing was prearranged."

Morton's singing encounter and this anecdote served those present to affirm an African diasporic identity that connects them not only to Ghana but also to other places in the Yoruba diaspora. As various authors have explained, since the late nineteenth century Yoruba traditions have been construed in the diaspora as more authentic and sophisticated than other African traditions, and this has led to a perception of the Yoruba as superior (Carneiro 1937; Parés 2004). Bahia has established its position as an epicenter of Afro-Brazilian culture partly on the basis of the presence of a strong Yoruba culture that is manifested in the Nagô Candomblé tradition.

Therefore, the establishing of connections with Yoruba-derived traditions in Africa and the diaspora served the Afro-Bahian audience present in this encounter as an authenticating device.

The musical event occurred after Morton and I lectured on Tabom history and demonstrated some *agbe* grooves and songs. This generated curiosity and expectations of a special, perhaps mystical connection between Morton and the priestesses in an audience that was largely unaware of the transatlantic history that connects Ghana and Bahia. The expectation was fulfilled in a concrete musical experience when Morton sang with the priestess. Musical sound became evidence of ancestral connection. But once again, this interpretation flies in the face of Morton's familiarity with the linguistic, melodic, and rhythmic material of the song he matched. This is why, for some, there was "no need to translate" or to further inquire into the specific aesthetic worlds that converged in this encounter.

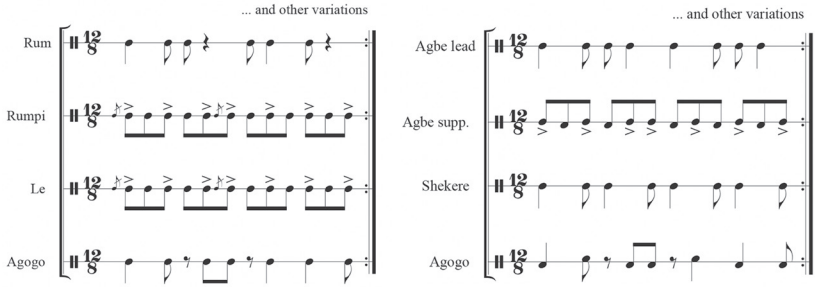
Drumming

As a master drummer, Morton was also expected to connect with local drummers, and he himself had similar expectations. We brought four *agbe* drums from Accra and two *agogôs* to play in those encounters and to offer as presents. Morton played with local drummers in various Afro-Brazilian genres, including Candomblé, *capoeira*, *samba de roda*, *samba reggae*, and *ijexá*. On most occasions he played his own *agbe* drum, and on others he tried local drums. Generally speaking, he felt more comfortable with grooves in compound meter, likely because they share the metric structure of *agbe* and other Ghanaian styles that he performs, such as *adenkun* and *asafo*.

This was particularly true when Morton met Gabriel Guedes, a well-known Candomblé drummer from Salvador who has vast experience of playing with jazz, carnival, and popular music groups. When Guedes learned that Morton and his community know and worship Shango, he demonstrated the *alujá* groove, which is used in Candomblé houses to praise this deity and also shares *agbe*'s timeline: [x.x.xx.x.x.x]. (Musical Example 4 shows other similarities between the *alujá* and *agbe* grooves, such as the accompanying drumming patterns, which are elaborations of the timeline.) Guedes played a basic accompanying drum pattern while I kept the timeline on the *agogô*. Morton listened attentively and, some ten seconds after we began, joined in with his *agbe* drum. It took Morton (and ourselves) another ten seconds or so to adjust from a tentative beginning, where our swing feels seemed to clash,[24] but once we had adjusted, Guedes and Morton engaged in a playful musical exchange in which they took turns accompanying and improvising. While playing, the two drummers expressed mutual approval by nodding their heads and uttering

expressions such as "Bonito!" (beautiful) and "Good," and they also demonstrated intense pleasure by closing their eyes, smiling, and rocking their bodies to the beat of the music. In Danielsen's words, they experienced "being in the groove."

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4. Alujá *(left) and* agbe *(right) polyrhythmic textures*

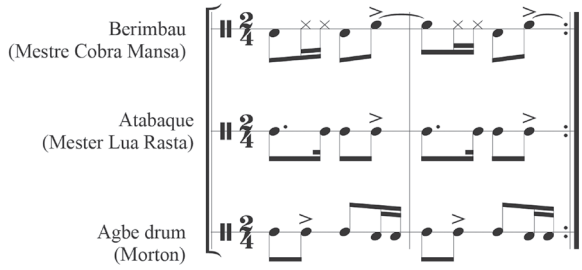


Both drummers knew that Shango and the [x.x.xx.x.x.x] pattern exist on both sides of the Atlantic. In 2015 I had played for Morton an audio recording of the *alujá* groove featuring the standard pattern on the bell and accompanying a song in Yoruba for Shango. When he learned that the recording had been made in Bahia, he said, "I would like to go there before I die." He did. Guedes's association of Candomblé rhythms and deities with African traditional religions was direct and unquestionable, as African continuity is a central narrative among adepts like himself. Therefore, as master drummers, Morton and Guedes had expectations of understanding each other well and of having a deep rhythmic connection during their encounter. It was precisely the materialization of those expectations through a shared embodied musical experience that confirmed their beliefs in a shared ancestry. Once they had finished, Guedes hugged Morton and called him "meu irmão africano" (my African brother). Like Valdina's interpretation, for Guedes this musical connection attested to the "strong connections between Brazil and Africa" and more specifically between Bahian Candomblé and the Tabom.[25]

However, Morton's rhythmic dialogues were not always smooth. At the end of the lecture demonstration at UFBA in which Morton sang with the Yoruba priestess, he was invited to join with his *agbe* drum in a jam session led by two *capoeira angola* masters (one playing a *berimbau* or musical bow, and another a barrel-shaped drum used in *capoeira* called *atabaque*). Other *capoeira* practitioners participated with a *pandeiro* (tambourine) and a double-mouthed bell known as an *agogô*, smaller than the eponymous Tabom instrument. The groove played was typical of *capoeira angola*

performances: the *atabaque*, *pandeiro*, and *agogô* played an ostinato pattern in 2/4, [x..xx.x.], with a characteristic accent on the "and" of beat 2, as shown in Musical Example 5. This ostinato set the scene for the *berimbau,* which played codified patterns and variations, and for responsorial songs in which the audience exchanged parts with a soloist (in this case, one of the *capoeira* masters). Because all four performers and most of the audience members were experienced *capoeira* practitioners, the music created a strong sense of group cohesion. The mood was celebratory. People shouted, clapped, smiled, and rocked their bodies to the beat of the music; that is, we were "in the groove." As in his encounter with Guedes, Morton began tentatively, but in this case, the adjustment never happened. The groove became chaotic, and soon afterward, one of the *capoeira* masters called an early ending. What happened? Perhaps Morton's swing feel clashed with that of the *capoeira* groove, and the required subtle adjustments among the five instrumentalists (Morton and the four players) were more difficult to achieve than in the encounter with Guedes because of the large size of the group engaged in the musical exchange, including dozens of singers and clappers. I also noticed that Morton consistently accentuated the "and" of the first beat (see *agbe* drum in Musical Example 5), a metric position that is rarely emphasized in the *capoeira* groove. One of the roles of *capoeira* masters is to ensure that the aesthetic of the *capoeira* groove is observed. It is possible that, by consistently accentuating the "and" of the first beat, Morton violated this *capoeira* aesthetic (perhaps giving the impression that he was playing the correct pattern but shifted in time by one beat, something seen by *capoeira* practitioners as a serious rhythmic infraction), which prompted the early closure.[26]

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 5. Berimbau, atabaque, *and* agbe *drum (UFBA, July 15, 2016).* Berimbau *and* atabaque *play basic* capoeira *patterns.*



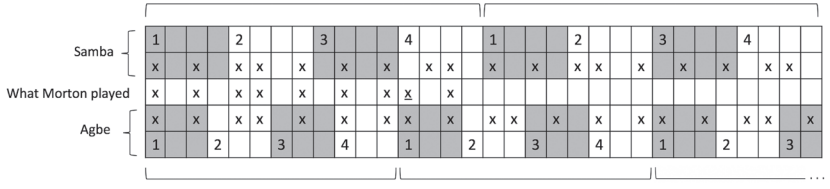
Morton's encounter with the African American priestess at UFBA not only set a celebratory tone for the *capoeira* jam session that ensued but also

generated expectations of further musical connections. That these were not fulfilled during the *capoeira* musical encounter shows that, in certain cases, successful musicking requires more than mere physical presence in a musical performance or shared belief. In this case, locking into a tight groove and reaching a groove state were prerequisites.

Morton's exchange with the *capoeiristas* did not confirm "ancestral connections" between Ghana and *capoeira* but may have reinforced a narrative, common among *capoeira* practitioners, that *capoeira* came to Brazil from Angola, a country distant from Morton's Accra. This interpretation frees Morton of the burden of representing a supposed African musicality that, in the imaginary of many, cuts across all regions of sub-Saharan Africa. Morton experienced similar difficulties when joining *capoeira* ensembles on other occasions in Salvador, Valença, and Cachoeira. He concluded that *capoeira* is "different," and in general, he showed less interest in this genre than in other Afro-Bahian musical expressions.[27]

At another encounter, Macambira (Marivaldo Pereira de Brito), a local percussionist and teacher from Salvador, tried to teach a common *samba* bell pattern to Morton. To our surprise, after various demonstrations, Morton was unable to match the pattern. At that point, I had studied *agbe* music with Morton for one year and had witnessed his tremendous capacity to memorize and reproduce musical rhythms. For instance, on various occasions he sang to me the *samba* drumming patterns that he had learned with Claudio Kron, a Brazilian percussionist who had taught him *samba* in Accra in preparation for a performance for President Lula in 2007; Morton accurately remembered four different parts of the composite texture. Moreover, on various occasions when I played musical videos of Afro-Brazilian music, he was able to identify, reproduce, and commit to memory bell patterns that have the same periodicity, density, and degree of syncopation as the one Macambira was teaching him. What happened?

MUSICAL EXAMPLE 6. Samba *and* agbe *timelines superimposed.*



The *samba* pattern in question was [x.x.xx.x.x.x.xx.]. However, Morton insisted on playing [x.x.xx.x.x.xx.x.], which is similar but anticipates the second-to-last note. Macambira demonstrated the correct pattern several times, and I explained the location of the error to Morton in various ways

(see underlined *x* in Musical Example 6), but there was no change in his interpretation of the pattern. Later I hypothesized that Morton was imposing a different metric framework. When the *samba* pattern is superimposed over the *agbe* bell pattern, the first seven notes match (see rows 2 and 4 in Musical Example 6). It is possible that this similarity in the two patterns prompted Morton to impose the 12/8 compound metric framework of *agbe* over the 2/4 simple meter of *samba*. My interpretation was reinforced when I listened to recordings of this encounter, as Morton insisted on placing a note in the thirteenth position of the sixteen-beat *samba* cycle. If my hypothesis is correct, this is the point where the twelve-beat *agbe* bell pattern begins. In other words, what we heard as an anticipation in the second-to-last note of the *samba* pattern was for Morton the downbeat of a second *agbe* bell pattern.

Regardless of my hypothesis's plausibility, this experience set the tone for the rest of this encounter, and in general Morton and Macambira had difficulties in engaging in meaningful musical conversation. They shared their stories, and each understood how important the Brazil-Africa relationship was for the other. However, there were no emotional expressions of brotherhood or celebrations of ancestral connection as in the encounters with Valdina, the Iyalorixás, and Guedes. The expectations of an experience of rhythmic understanding were unfulfilled, no groove state was reached, and this prevented the field of music, emotion, and imagination from being activated.

Last, Morton's drumming technique during his encounters reflected how he felt empowered in Bahia. During his musical encounters Morton drummed sometimes with a stick and a bare hand, as he typically does in *agbe*, and at other times with bare hands. When playing *agbe* he holds a thick stick with his left hand, which plays the more salient notes of the rhythm while the bare right hand, which lost a great deal of mobility and strength in an accident in his youth, softly fills in the spaces between them. I was, then, surprised to see him playing his *agbe* drum with both bare hands at a jam session with various Afro-Bahian players at a cafe in Salvador. I approached him and suggested that he could use his stick in order to be heard more, and his response was, "This is not *agbe*." From that moment onward, I noticed that Morton played his or other drums with bare hands on occasions that he perceived as less "sacred." But I was still curious to know how he could use his damaged hand to drum as vigorously as he was doing. His answer was, "It is Shango. He has given me the force." According to him, in Accra he could not use his right hand, but in Bahia, the land of Shango, he could. In Morton's own words: "Now I tell you, before we came here. You asked me, 'Oh you can't play with your right hand, can you?' Nowadays I play [with both hands]. Remember that time in Accra when we went to [visit] that Rasta man who gave [us] beer. I said,

'I don't play with my [right] hand.' Yesterday you asked me, 'How do you play with your right hand'? . . . Shango gave me power to come here. . . . Because Shango is hard power for the Tabom. . . . That is why, if you want something, you go to Shango."[28]

Morton's belief in Shango, central to his narrative of Brazilian ancestry, thus materialized through the experience of playing drums with his injured hand. His diasporic condition was embodied and reasserted.

Bahia: The Land of Shango

Morton's visit to the Tabom priestess in Accra reassured him that Shango was watching him with protective eyes during his trip. But this did not mean that everything went smoothly. Morton suffered from culture shock when we arrived in Salvador. Many things were new to him: the food, the music, the language, the infrastructure, and even the ethos and mixed racial makeup of the people. Moreover, he was treated as a guest of honor, something far removed from his humble existence in Accra. Morton was excited by the novelty and by the preferential treatment he received but at times seemed puzzled and withdrawn.[29] I was surprised to hear him ask one week after our arrival to Salvador, "When are we going to Bahia where Nii Alasha [a returnee and one of his ancestors] came from?" In preparation for our trip I had explained to him several times, map in hand, that Salvador was the capital of Bahia and that this was likely the point of departure of his Tabom ancestors. I explained this again upon arrival, and the point was revisited in his first encounters. But in Morton's mind Salvador seemed to be only an intermediate stop on his trip to "Bahia."

The first signs that he was beginning to make the connection occurred in dreams in which Morton saw his deceased grandmother, sister, and aunt. In conversations he expressed the belief that the spirit of all Tabom surrounded us. Many Tabom believe that the spirits of their deceased return to Bahia to reunite with those of their ancestors. As a master drummer, Morton presides over a funerary ritual with music, dance, and song that facilitates this symbolic transition. These dreams are therefore linked to this ritual and belief. But the turning point occurred when Morton saw an incarnate Shango for the first time. At a visit to the Candomblé house Ilê Axé Icimimó Agunjú Didê in the rural area of Cachoeira, Morton was welcomed enthusiastically by a priest, a group of musicians, some devotees, and a young female dancer possessed by Shango. The scene was dramatic: as we approached the house we could hear the drumming of *alujá*, Shango's signature rhythm, and see Shango (i.e., the female dancer embodying Shango) standing at the door waiting for Morton. Morton understood from the drumming groove and the way the dancer was dressed that it was Shango who was waiting for him. He then proceeded to salute



FIGURE 4. *Eric Morton dancing with Shango at the Candomblé house Ilê Axé Icimimó Agunjú Didê, Cachoeira, July 2016. Photo by Nilton Pereira.*

Shango, thank him, and dance with him (see Figure 4). He was invited to sit at a chair reserved for guests of honor while Shango continued dancing for him to drumming and songs. Morton was also invited to see and bless the *asentamento de Xangô* (Shango's shrine), a sacred place accessible only to people ranking high in Candomblé hierarchy. By the time we were ready to leave, Shango had abandoned the body of the medium. Morton hugged the dancer and thanked her once again with the song "Iyalode" to the beat of the drums. The dancer fell into possession again while everybody celebrated by shouting and playing more energetically, and with tears. Morton thanked Shango again for his presence. As we were leaving, the priest gave Morton a *xére*, a rare sacred rattle that symbolizes spiritual power and connection with Shango. After we left, Morton said: "Did you see that? Shango knows I am here! He is welcoming me to Bahia." Morton realized that he had arrived in Bahia. He experienced the Bahia of his ancestors that he and other Tabom had idealized.

Similar experiences in other Candomblé houses in Cachoeira and Santo Amaro reinforced Morton's belief that Shango was aware of his presence. At a Candomblé house in the Quilombola community Kaonge in Cachoeira,[30] a priestess also incorporated Shango upon hearing Morton

singing "Iyalode." This was the second time that Shango responded to this song. Morton declared: "Now I know where Shango comes from. I have seen him with my naked eye. Bahia is the land of Shango." The song "Iyalode" triggered religious presence and confirmed a long-held belief that Bahia is the original land of Shango. Once again, music, an intense embodied response, and discourse converged.

The assurance and comfort that Morton felt in these religious encounters is, to some extent, comparable to that experienced by many of those taken from Africa to Brazil and also by some of those who returned from Brazil to West Africa. These individuals re-created religious practices brought from the opposite shore of the Atlantic in order to cope with the challenges of their new life conditions, to find meaning in their experience, and to assert their identities. As various authors have explained, Shango is one of the most widespread deities that have accompanied Africans and their descendants in their transatlantic journeys (Schaumloeffel 2008; Tishken, Falola, and Akinyemi 2009; Parés and Castillo 2015). It is also precisely the same deity that has helped Morton establish connection with his ancestral land. But Morton's claim that Bahia is the land of Shango rubs against the Yoruba origins of this deity.

In Accra, Morton and I visited a family named Quarcoopome who claim to be descendants of Nigerians who brought the first cult of Shango to Accra in 1824—that is, likely before the Tabom's arrival. They claim that "Shango is originally from Nigeria," and for that reason their Shango was stronger (i.e., more responsive and effective in helping believers) than the Tabom's.[31] Later, Morton and the Shango priestess of the Tabom reassured me that *their* Shango "is Brazilian, not Nigerian."[32] Morton knows that Shango is also worshipped in western Nigeria. I have explained to him that Shango originally arrived in Brazil with enslaved people coming from Yorubaland well before his Tabom ancestors came to Ghana. By referring to their own Shangos, Morton and Quarcoopome imply that Shango can take on specific attributes and histories fitting the narratives and needs of a group or family. This is consistent with the way deities have been historically appropriated in the Ga community, to which the Tabom and the Quarcoopome family are closely related.[33] Like the returnees themselves, Shango is a foundational figure that connects the Tabom with Brazil, hence Morton's insistence on emphasizing the Brazilianness of this deity.

Morton's belief in Shango's Brazilianness, reinforced by his visits to Candomblé houses, helped him feel reassured, protected, and empowered. As a result, he felt compelled to make frequent offerings for Shango while in Bahia. After his encounter with Shango in Cachoeira, Morton began taking every opportunity to pour libations in Shango's honor in advance of *agbe* lessons and performances and in everyday situations. He would also

attribute everything positive that happened to him to Shango's grace, including ordinary occurrences such as arriving home safely after a long day of traveling.

Closing Remarks

In 1963 the Brazilian government invited to Brazil Romana da Conceição, a descendant of African slaves who was born in Pernambuco, Brazil, in 1889 and who moved with her family to Nigeria in 1899. According to Paulina Alberto (2011), Romana visited at a time when the Brazilian government was seeking to increase its political and economic influence in Africa. She helped the government to demonstrate the strong cultural ties that Brazil has with Africa and to sell an image of racial tolerance. The event was designed "for Africans to see," Alberto writes. Romana was treated with great respect, but on the basis of idealized and condescending interpretations of Africa and of the place of black women in Brazilian society. For instance, governmental officials and media portrayed Romana as a "Mãe Preta" (black mother), a figure who in the times of slavery looked after her master's children and who was later revered by Gilberto Freyre as "the main agent of Brazilian hybridism" (Alberto 2011, 142). When Romana met Mãe Senhora, a famous Candomblé priestess who later received the title "Mãe Preta do Brasil" (Black Mother of Brazil), in Bahia, the media commented on how Senhora was Romana's counterpart in Brazil (Alberto 2011, 143). The message was clear: Brazilian returnees to Africa were alive inside Candomblé worship houses in Bahia.

Half a century later, during Morton's visit, the Brazilian government was going through a second intense phase of approach to Africa, seeking to increase south-south cooperation, to open markets to Brazilian companies, to gain access to natural resources, and, in the words of President Lula, to "bridge the Atlantic" and "pay a historical debt" to Africa (Stuenkel 2013, 30). Although the government did not organize Morton's visit, several officials took the opportunity to meet him and convey the message that Brazil is deeply connected with and appreciative of Africa. Various functionaries of the federal government flew from Brasília to Bahia specifically to meet Morton, and numerous local civil servants also met him and offered various forms of logistical support.[34] As was Romana, Morton was treated as a guest of honor, albeit on the basis of idealized views of Africa.

During his visit, Morton embodied many of the stereotyped notions of Africa that Afro-Bahians have constructed from their knowledge of Candomblé. As a master drummer, he confirmed the notion that African music is centered on rhythm and mainly percussive. He was quick to dance to music on every occasion, confirming the stereotype that Africans respond to music primarily with their bodies rather than their minds, and

with the multiple references to Shango present in *agbe*, Morton also reinforced the local notion that African music always touches on the spiritual. *Agbe*, the musical style of the Tabom, shares many aesthetic features with Candomblé music: it is polyrhythmic, played exclusively with percussion, and features responsorial songs in Yoruba, ritual dance, possession, and references to Shango. It is thus not surprising that Morton and the Candomblé devotees felt a high degree of familiarity and connection to each other. In some ways, each saw in the other a reflection of themselves, now and in the past. Before the trip Morton told me that he was curious to discover "how they played *agbe* in Brazil." He found the answer in Candomblé houses. The Candomblé devotees and Morton approached their encounters with an ideology of sameness. They looked for and emphasized what they shared: lyrics, patterns, melodies, playing techniques, deities. More important, their narratives about a shared ancestry and transatlantic identity were confirmed through concrete experiences involving music, emotion, and religious presence. The same cannot be said of Morton's encounters with some *capoeira* and carnival *samba* drummers, during which the participants struggled to connect musically. This does not mean that Morton and his counterparts questioned their own or each other's ancestry and identity, only that the experience was not one of reaffirmation or pride.

Despite the deep connection shared in some of their encounters, Morton and his Bahian counterparts had unique interpretations and reactions. In general, Bahians interpreted the experience as a confirmation of a belief in a mystical ancestral connection (e.g., "our ancestors are connecting through the music") and demonstrated intense embodied responses ranging from expansive physical gestures to tears and to trance. Morton, however, interpreted many encounters as welcoming signs from Shango. He was deeply moved in the presence of this deity and enjoyed the experience in a discreet way, as he usually does in his role of master drummer in Ghana. Despite these differences, in both cases the intensity of their experiences grounded their diasporic condition.

The visit of returnees like Morton, Romana, and others to Brazil has far-reaching implications in the construction of black Atlantic identities on both sides of the Atlantic. In the words of the historian Luis Nicolau Parés, "Contemporary dialogs between returnees in West Africa and Brazil give continuity to dialogs that began in the nineteenth century, help to reestablish memories, and contribute to strengthen processes of identity among African descendants in Brazil and other places of the Americas."[35] Morton's visit to Bahia generated a great deal of expectation among his community in Accra, and the stories, experiences, images, and sounds he brought back will likely have a profound impact on how the Tabom imagine and relate to Brazil in the future. Likewise, through Morton,

Afro-Bahians learned an obscure story of transatlantic connections between Brazil and Ghana that enabled them to strengthen and celebrate their discourses of connection with Africa. These effects may be more far-reaching and take multiple directions as the communities continue to visit each other in the future, as they have promised they will do.[36]

This article verifies the centrality of music in African and Brazilian diasporic expression, not necessarily because it may have retained certain traits or be construed as "African" or "Brazilian," but because it provides an ideal context for musicians to have experiences grounding their diasporic condition. In the heat of successful musicking emotions arise, expectations about deep musical connection are fulfilled, beliefs about a shared ancestry are confirmed, the diasporic condition is reaffirmed and celebrated, and as a result the participants feel connected, reassured, and dignified. Eric Morton's visit to Bahia exemplifies the complexities of the diasporic condition in the black Atlantic. It shows how essentialist discourses about African music and identity are mobilized and negotiated for empowerment while real and imagined Africas and Brazils function as home and diaspora simultaneously.

Notes

1. Born in 1955 in Accra, Eric Morton grew up in a traditional Tabom family, where he was exposed to Tabom traditional practices and narratives. In that environment he learned the song and drumming repertoire of *agbe*, the only distinct musical style of the Tabom that he now commands. In 2000 he was officially invested with the title of *Agbetse* (lit. "the father of *agbe*," in Ga), which made him the foremost musical authority in his community. In that role Morton receives small monetary compensations after the ceremonies at which he plays. Additionally, he works as a house painter to support himself and his family. He received little formal education (he completed only the elementary school cycle) and lives a modest life with great material limitations, but he is an important and proud culture bearer of his community who has dreamed all his life about visiting Bahia. Morton visited Lagos for a week in 2005 with a group of fellow Tabom drummers and dancers to attend a Tabom funeral. This was the only international experience he had before his trip to Brazil. I met Morton in Accra in 2015 and took drumming and singing lessons with him for a year and participated in various Tabom funerary celebrations as a drummer and singer under his direction.

2. *Candomblé* is a generic term used in Brazil, particularly in the state of Bahia, to refer to a group of syncretic Afro-Brazilian religions mixing Catholicism with various kinds of African traditional religious practices. Despite its great variety, Candomblé is often subdivided by practitioners and scholars into three main nations or traditions, each associated with a particular cultural or linguistic African region: Nagô, related to the Yoruba heritage; Jeje, linked to the Fon and Ewe; and Angola, related to the Congo-Angola. Each nation has its own protocol, set of

deities, song repertoire, ritual language, and drumming patterns used in ceremonies to summon deities into the bodies of initiates through spirit possession.

3. Various Tabom have reported that throughout their history they suffered persecution by the Ghanaian government, especially on the eve of the Aliens Compliance Order of 1969. This order, mainly meant to deport Nigerians from Ghana, triggered exacerbated nationalism among some Ghanaians. Tabom elders remember being challenged by neighbors to leave Ghana if they felt so attached to Brazil (Díaz 2016b, 17).

4. Georgina Theodora Wood (b. 1947), a Tabom who claims to be a descendant of returnee Mama Nassu and former chief justice of Ghana (2007–2017), paid a brief official visit to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2008 (Essien 2016, 207).

5. The Tabom are a relatively small group of people from Ghana who self-identify as Brazilian descendants. Because they are highly integrated with the Ga-Adangbe people from Accra, they may be seen as a subset of that group. Grouped in families with names such as Nelson, Peregrino, Lutterodt, and Morton, they are mostly concentrated in Accra, particularly in the Ga traditional territories of Otublohum, Bukom, New Town, Adabraka, and Asylum Down. However, there are Tabom communities in other parts of Ghana (e.g., Kumasi) and abroad (London, Lagos, and the United States). Soon after their arrival (around the 1830s), the Tabom adopted a chieftaincy system integrated with that of the Ga people, with a chief, a queen mother, a council of elders, and a court of representatives. They are not officially recognized as a separate group by the Ghanaian government but have gained some national visibility and support for the maintenance and promotion of their culture largely through their relationship with the Brazilian embassy in Ghana since the 1960s.

6. Historians agree that this was a period when Yoruba-speaking people arrived in larger numbers in Bahia, but there is no consensus on the exact percentage of Yorubas among those who arrived. See Lovejoy (2004) for a discussion of the difficulties of determining the exact number of Yoruba speakers who arrived in Bahia and other diasporic centers in the Americas.

7. See Reis (1986) for more about the Malê Revolt.

8. Referring to exchanges between Brazilian returnees from Accra and other West African places, Essien (2010, 106) has written that the Tabom "engaged in routine visits to the Bight of Benin (Nigeria, Benin and Togo), especially Lagos and other territories in Nigeria." Essien also documented the arrival of Nigerians in Accra during the nineteenth century and the influence they had on local culture: "The British transported a number of 'Alata' people [a derogatory term used by Ghanians to refer to Nigerians] from Nigeria to serve as laborers in Accra. The gradual creation of Alata Nigerian towns around Otublohum [a neighborhood in Accra] by some of these immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century Accra . . . speaks to the phenomenon of Ghanaian-Nigerian interactions which increased during British rule" (119–120). These exchanges are confirmed by Tabom narratives (Díaz 2016b) and by other authors (Schaumloeffel 2008, xxx).

9. See Essien (2016) and Amos and Ayesu (2002) for detailed accounts of this period.

10. Dan Morton and Georgina Theodora Wood, two prominent Tabom, have paid short visits to Brazil but not Bahia (Díaz 2016b; Essien 2016). Kai Lutterodt,

a young Tabom woman who was born and raised in London, visited Bahia briefly in 2013 (personal communication, January 2017, London). This is the only documented Tabom visit to Bahia before Eric Morton's. Nobody among the Tabom I met in Accra knew about Kai Lutterodt's visit to Bahia.

11. *Agbe* integrates drumming, dance, and song following aesthetics comparable to other West African drumming genres, as discussed by Nzewi (1974), Locke (1982), Anku (2000), and others.

12. Many Tabom claim that the name of their people derives from the Portuguese expression "está bom" or its short form "tá bom," which roughly translates as "it's all right." They explain that when their ancestors first came from Brazil, they could not understand any of the local languages and responded impatiently to every greeting with the phrase "tá bom, tá bom." Soon after this, locals began to refer to them as the Tabom people.

13. Eric Morton and other Tabom claim that *agbe* comes from Ijesha (or Ijesa) in Nigeria. However, the precise location of Ijesha is unclear. Ilesa (Iléṣà) is a city in Osun State in southwestern Nigeria (some two hundred kilometers northeast of Lagos) and also the name of a historical state centered on that city. Ijesa is the name of a subgroup of the Yoruba who live in Ilesa. There are various small towns inhabited by the Ijesa people with phonetically related names such as Erin Ijesa, Ipetu Jesa, Ijebu Jesa, Ijeda, and Ilase. Finally, Igbesa is a small town in the Nigerian state of Ogun, located some fifteen kilometers west of Lagos.

14. Eric Morton, personal communication, October 20, 2015, Accra.

15. The first documented reference of the Tabom's Shango is from Raymundo Souza Dantas (1965, 47), who lived in Ghana in 1961 as Brazil's first ambassador. Parés and Castillo (2015) documented the case of other returnees from Bahia to Benin who also brought Shango cults with them in the 1830s.

16. Eric Morton, personal communication, July 2016, Accra.

17. The last census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in 2010 determined that, of a total of 14,016,906 Bahians, 17.1 percent identify themselves as *pretos* (blacks) and 59.2 percent as *pardos* (mixed race). In Salvador, the capital of Bahia, of the 2,675,656 who live in the city, 27.8 percent identify as *pretos* and 51.7 percent as *pardos*. Because a large portion of these *pretos* and *pardos* claim to be African descendants, sometimes black activists combine the two figures to claim that in Salvador nearly 80 percent of the population is of African descent.

18. David Eltis (2013) estimates that 1,550,354 enslaved Africans arrived in Bahia between 1576 and 1855. This represents 31.9 percent of all enslaved Africans arriving in Brazil during the transatlantic slave trade and 14.5 percent of those who arrived in the Americas. After Rio de Janeiro, Bahia was the place in the Atlantic basin that received most Africans during this period.

19. Pândegos de Africa and Embaixada Africana were among the first percussion ensembles to parade through the streets of Salvador in 1887, wearing African-styled cloths and celebrating their African heritage. This tradition was maintained throughout the twentieth century by *afoxes*, *blocos afro*, *capoeira*, and *samba de roda* groups.

20. See the documentary *Tabom in Bahia* (Díaz and Pereira 2017, 31:30–32:02).

21. Morton's familiarity with Yoruba terms used in Candomblé songs was confirmed at a Candomblé ceremony in Salvador in the Ilê Axé Tony Solayo worship

house. The ceremony was the anniversary of the passing of a former spiritual leader. Without being told about the purpose of the event, Morton whispered in my ear, "These people are sad because someone important has died." When I asked him how he knew, he told me that he learned this through the songs. Likewise, when Morton dedicated the song "Iyalode" to Valdina, she reported that she knew the meaning (queen mother) through a Candomblé song of the Nagô (Yoruba-derived) tradition with the same name.

22. Like other Candomblé leaders, Valdina was knowledgeable about the genealogies of the different Candomblé nations. During the conversation that preceded the songs, she explained to Morton the differences in ritual language used in each of the three major Candomblé nations.

23. A *santero* is a practitioner of Cuban Santería, a syncretic religion mixing Catholicism and African religious practices in a similar way to Brazilian Candomblé, Haitian Vodou, or Trinidadian Sango.

24. I have found that when playing *agbe*, Morton tends to play the triplet subdivisions of main beats as long-short-medium rather than evenly. Angelo Cardoso (2006, 67–68), measuring the subdivisions of the important Candomblé groove *vassi*, which has the same timeline as *agbe*, infers at least four patterns of beat subdivision: short-medium-long, medium-medium-medium, medium-short-long, and long-short-medium. Morton's long-short-medium is only one of these four, so his feel may have at first clashed, on a micro-level, with that of Guedes.

25. Gabriel Guedes, personal communication, July 2016, Salvador.

26. Some *capoeira* masters may be quite dogmatic about the way *capoeira* instruments must be played. According to particular standards, some ascribe spiritual qualities to the *berimbau* and other instruments and thus make efforts to play them according to standards even in contexts outside a *capoeira* performance.

27. For instance, after a visit to the *capoeira* master Cobra Mansa (who was present at the UFBA event) at his house in Valença, Morton and Cobra Mansa exchanged musical instruments as presents: Morton gave a set of *agbe* drums and received a *berimbau*, the emblematic musical bow of the *capoeira* art. On our return to Ghana Morton left his *berimbau* behind, saying that there was no point in bringing it because he did not know how to play it.

28. Eric Morton, personal communication, July 25, 2016, Salvador.

29. Morton's experience in Bahia of combining high expectations and culture shock is, perhaps, comparable to that of his ancestors when they arrived in Accra in the nineteenth century.

30. Quilombolas are organized communities recognized by the Brazilian government since 2003 as "self-defined ethno-racial groups who have their own historical trajectory, specific territorial relations, and a presumed black ancestry related to the historical oppression they have suffered" (Presidency of Brazil, Decree 4887 of 2003, Art. 2). More than two thousand Quilombola communities are currently recognized by the Brazilian government with rights of collective land ownership, and many are active in preserving identities and practices related to their African heritage. Many of these communities claim to be descendants of historical *quilombos*, which are related but distinct communities formed by runaway slaves in Brazil since at least the seventeenth century.

31. Ebenezer Quarcoopome, personal communication, May 6, 2016, Accra.

32. Eric Morton and Lekia Nelson, personal communication, May 6, 2016, Accra.

33. This is also consistent with the ways deities are treated by the Ewe in Ghana's Volta Region (Friedson 2009).

34. Functionaries of the federal government who traveled from Brasília to meet Morton in Bahia included the president of the Palmares Cultural Foundation (a body linked to the Ministry of Culture dedicated to the preservation and promotion of black culture in Brazil) and various members of the National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage (another body linked to the Ministry of Culture and responsible for preserving the tangible and intangible heritage of the country). Various local civil servants met Morton and offered various forms of logistical support during the trip, including the arrangement of local transportation and meetings and lodging in the city of Cachoeira. They included members of the government of the state of Bahia and of the municipalities of Salvador and Cachoeira.

35. Nicolau Parés, personal communication, July 28, 2016, Salvador.

36. In October 2019 a delegation of the Bahian carnival association Olodum visited Ghana during an African tour to celebrate their fortieth anniversary. Olodum's director, whom Morton met in Bahia, was one of the visitors, and he made a point of visiting Morton and the Tabom in Accra.

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