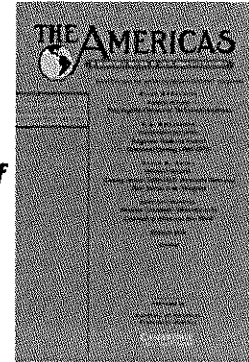


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IN-DEPTH REVIEW: *The Formation of Candomblé: Vodun History and Ritual in Brazil*,
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By J. Lorand Matory

The Atlantic slave trade extracted kidnapped populations from the entirety of the western African coast between what are now Senegal and Angola, as well as parts of the east African coast in what is now Mozambique. Western slave traders and buyers regularly classified their human merchandise in terms of the African region, coastal town, or commercial fortress from which they had embarked, or in terms of an ethnic group that presumably derived from that place. With such presumptions, ethnic groupings such as Congo, Angola, Carabalí, Ibo, Nagô, Lucumí, Mina, Arará, Koromantee, and so forth were called “nations.”

TRADEMARKS

However, these nations typically aggregated populations that spoke diverse languages, had never lived together in a single political unit, and had never thought of themselves as a single people. Hence, Gerhard Kubik (1979), reflecting on this fact, called these “nation”-based denominations “trademarks.” As such, they remained useful in the projects of many American slaveholders, who sought in these terms information about the skills and the character of their potential workers; of Roman Catholic missionaries, who organized the newly baptized captives in groups based on these terms; and of some colonial governors, who believed that Africans organized around such ethno-national differences among themselves would remain divided, rather than unite against their European and Euro-American oppressors.

On the other hand, the Africans belonging to each such nation, or trademark, were highly conscious of their antecedent and enduring diversity. For example, African-born Nagôs also understood themselves to belong to sub-nations, such as Oyo, Ègba, and Ijebu. Similarly, the members of the Jeje nation also considered themselves Marrins, Dagomés, Savalús, and so forth. Nonetheless, they were encouraged to worship, work and celebrate together in nations. Moreover, in contrast to whites and locally born black people, both Nagôs and Jejes often understood themselves to be “African.” Author Luis Nicolau Parés begins his encyclopedic account of the history and distinctive religious practices of the Jeje nation with just such an explanation of their dynamic identities, as well as a review of the African origins and the demographics of the Jeje population in Brazil.

A further background detail is instructive. Captives from the same port were often named differently by traders from different European nations or regions of the Americas. For example, the people called “Nagô” by Portuguese and Brazilian traders were called “Lucumí” by the Spanish traders. Therefore, the internally heterogeneous population of Nagôs gathered in Brazil had a counterpart in the Lucumís of Cuba.

Similarly, the Arará nation of Cuba had a counterpart in Minas Gerais and southern Brazil called the Mina nation, and another in Bahia called the Jeje nation. The Jeje populations had typically embarked from the port of Ouidah and its surrounds, and they spoke a range of related languages, including Ewe, Gen, Aja and Fon, which linguists call collectively the E.G.A.F dialect cluster (or the Gbè languages, because *-gbè* is the term for language in many of the associated language varieties).

Most of the names of these nations and sub-nations have a fairly obvious origin in West Africa. For example, 'Nàgó' is a western-borderlands term for the people who are now called Yoruba. Dahomean armies from the west kidnapped many people from these borderlands and sold them to European merchants on the coast. The Portuguese and the Brazilian traders therefore called them Nagôs. The term Lucumí is short for *oluku mi*, meaning "my friend" in several of the language varieties that would come to be called "Yoruba." In contrast, the origin of the term 'Jeje' is still hotly debated. It first appears in Brazilian archival records in 1711, but it did not appear in any of the many subsequent writings by visitors to the West African coast until 1864—153 years later. Thus, the first publication of the term in West Africa occurred *after* the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, in the writings of Western missionaries and merchants hosted by Afro-Brazilian "returnees" from Brazil to West Africa (Matory, 1999b; 2005, pp. 79–85; Parés, *Formation*, pp. 24–29).

"SURVIVALS" VS. "DIALOGUE": RIVAL ANALYTIC MODELS OF AFRO-ATLANTIC CULTURAL HISTORY

This ironic fact is the linchpin of a hearty and worthwhile debate between Luis Nicolau Parés and me about the relative worth of two analytical models of Afro-Atlantic history: "survivals" vs. "dialogue." On the one hand, Parés relies heavily on the model, first proposed by Melville J. Herskovits, that Afro-Brazilian, Afro-North American, and other "Afro-American" cultures can be analyzed "ethnohistorically" as products to one degree or another of the "survival" of cultural traits brought from Africa by the slaves and either adapted to American circumstances or gradually forgotten. I agree that this model highlights and makes room for many important aspects of Afro-American, or African American, cultural history, such as the logic and practice of spirit possession common to many West African and African American civilizations. I am also conscious of the white-dominated American colonial and postcolonial contexts that have, as Mintz and Price (1992 [1976]) point out in their "creolization" model, limited and shaped the reproduction of African-American cultures over time. Parés pays little attention to this second dynamic and prefers to emphasize the astonishing success of Africans and their descendants at remembering and reproducing the precise configurations of belief and practice brought by the founders of their temples directly from the founders' specific African places of origin.

In several 1999 articles and in my 2005 book *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*, I presented a series

of cases in which major ideas, identities, and practices in Africa were revised based upon the inspiration of free African Diaspora people who traveled to West Africa during and after the slave trade. These are cases in which writings in the cosmopolitan city of Lagos have, in response to the colonial situation, transformed African ideas; in which these and other ideas, identities, and practices have changed within Africa *after* the end of the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade and then *subsequently* influenced the Americas; and in which transatlantic travel, commerce, and the mutual gaze among free Africans and African Americans from diverse countries, as well as people of European descent, have shaped phenomena that Herskovitsians have long mistaken for mere “survivals” of some primordial African culture.

I explain these dynamic phenomena and non-linear cultural transformations in terms of what I call the “live dialogue between Africa and the Americas.” I do not believe that we can understand the history of the Jeje identity outside the context of this dialogue (Matory, 2006; 1999a). Parés, while acknowledging the influence of the live dialogue on “the discourses, values, ideas and collective identities that turn around [religious practice]” (Parés, 2005; *Formation*, pp. 26–27, 47, 119–123, 200, 239–240), postulates that the effects of this ongoing, circum-Atlantic flow of people and ideas on “religious practices” (*Formation*, p. 240) must be “tangential” (*Formation*, p. 122). Parés argues that what matters—regardless of subsequent adaptations in their American and their translocal, dialogical contexts—is where in Africa an African-American religious practice “comes from.”

A TEST CASE: THE FORMATION OF THE JEJE NATION

Because of its clear parallels to many West African religions, its beauty, and its institutional complexity, the Afro-Brazilian religion known as Candomblé has been a test case for these and many more hypotheses about the genesis and the nature of African-American cultures. Parés’s *Formation of Candomblé* specifically examines the nation, or denomination, of the Candomblé religion founded by the Jeje people. Like many such religions of music, dance, divination, blood sacrifice, and spirit possession in the Americas, Candomblé is divided into denominations referring to the nations, or trademarks (which Parés calls the “meta-ethnic identities”), of the African captives taken to the Americas up to the mid-nineteenth century.

Parés defines the Jeje nation in Brazil as isomorphic with the speakers of the West African Gbè languages and their religious descendants, and he presumes that these populations are united religiously by the worship of gods called *vodun*. He regards the West African region that he calls the “vodun area” as the origin of the Brazilian Jeje nation and says that this area is coterminous with the Gbè-speaking region. He does not seem to realize that the speakers of Ewe and Gen, who typically call their gods *yehwe*, are also among the Gbè-speakers. His “vodun area” is constructed expressly in contrast to the *yehwe*-worshiping Mina and Gen peoples to the west and to the “*orixá*”-worshiping “Nagô” people to the east (pp. 14–15). No thought is given to whether this

population defined itself in this way, or under what circumstances. Rather, the author unreflexively postulates that his is an objective way of dividing one allegedly discrete African population from another and thereby attributing a single, fixed African origin to each word, practice, and person in the Afro-Brazilian diaspora. It should be noted that Parés's focus on the term *vodun* will include Cuba's Arará nation but exclude Haitian religion from the object of analysis, because Haitian worshipers call their gods *lwa*, not *vodun*. Most Herskovitsians would object to this exclusion. Parés thus overestimates the realism and transhistorical fixity of trademarks and of ethno-cultural categories generally. He also seems unaware of the degree to which his realist presuppositions about ethnicity in Africa overdetermine his conclusions about American cultural history.

At its heart, *The Formation of Candomblé* is an encyclopedic study of two Jeje-Marrim temples (Parés calls them "Jeje Mahi") in the state of Bahia—one in Salvador, the other in Cachoeira. Salvador's Bogum temple existed in the 1860s but is documented best, after a long gap in the record, from 1890. The Seja Hundé temple in Cachoeira has existed since about 1896. Parés presents these two temples and the information their priestly affiliates give about them as representative of the "Jeje Mahi" sub-nation and the Jeje Mahi sub-nation as representative of the entire Jeje nation, since Mahi is reportedly the dominant Jeje sub-nation. This methodological premise, which presents itself as an objective report of truth, ignores the fact that perhaps the best-known and most prestigious Jeje temple today belongs to the Jeje-Savalú sub-nation and hosts practices quite different from those that Parés says define legitimate membership in the Jeje nation as a whole. It is through the words of the affiliates of the two "Jeje Mahi" temples—cross-checked against the state archives, newspaper files, and published sources—that Parés also legitimately reconstructs the history of the foundation of these temples, their succession of leaders (along with their leadership struggles and leadership styles), the people they initiated, and their interactions with the leaders of other temples and with secular political leaders.

This is truly impressive micro-history. Parés offers an unprecedented level of detail about the history of these temples, the terminology they employ, their sacred beliefs, and their ritual practices. However, this attempt at careful historical ethnography is arguably undermined by the author's passionate campaign to establish the distinctness of the Jeje nation and to avenge its honor. Parés's partisan project of Jeje national redemption inspires him to establish the standards of membership in the Jeje nation—that is, the beliefs and ritual practices that he reports are alternately required of or forbidden to members and therefore mark the difference between a member of the Jeje nation, on the one hand, and a member of, say, the Nagô or the Angola nation, on the other. In defining these standards of membership in the nation, or "diacritica," Parés relies on the declarations of his tutors from two, or perhaps three, temples, all of which belong to the dominant Jeje Mahi sub-nation. Yet allowing a dominant sub-group to define the membership criteria of the whole group—particularly when there is no existing institution on the ground that actually enforces these standards—is not social history or cultural anthropology, but an unapologetically partisan political intervention on the part of Parés. With the term "diacritica," Parés signals a debt to Fredrik Barth, perhaps

the most influential anthropological theorist of ethnicity in the twentieth century. Yet Parés neglects Barth's most useful insights, regarding the proteanness, permeability, and economically motivated dynamism of ethnic categories.

Parés does not limit himself to endorsing the membership standards stipulated by priests. He adds his *own* opinions about what should count as legitimate and defining practices in the Jeje nation. Parés reports that he has discovered several further unique aspects and contributions of Jeje practice of which practitioners themselves are unaware. These too he includes among his diacritica, or membership criteria. It is worth noting that, although it may not be scientifically appropriate, it is not rare for ethnographers to contribute their own opinions to defining the legitimate standards of religious practice; indeed, those scholar-enhanced definitions have profoundly influenced the practice of several Afro-Atlantic religions. See, for example, Matory (2003).

The backdrop of Parés's study and campaign is the reality, known to most students and practitioners of the Candomblé religion—that the Jeje nation has contributed a great deal to the repertoire of sacred vocabulary and ritual practice shared among all the nations of Candomblé. An even more obvious fact is that the most prestigious and imitated temples and models of religious practice in today's Candomblé are not Jeje but Nagô. As a group, the temples of the Jeje nation enjoy an outsized level of prestige relative to the small population of its membership. Nonetheless, in the words of one of Parés's own most active tutors, "The time of the Jeje is over." The group's once-sizable membership and influence have been in sharp decline since at least the end of the nineteenth century, and perhaps as early as the beginning of that century.

Nagô captives began to outnumber the Jejes at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but Parés argues that uniquely Jeje forms of institutional organization enabled their preeminent influence to endure until around 1870. To explain how the Jejes lost their leadership of the Candomblé world, Parés relies on my argument that the Afro-Brazilian travelers who crisscrossed the Atlantic during and after the 1890s brought to Bahia the influence of a contemporaneous African literary and cultural-nationalist revival called the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance (Matory, 1999b). Having adopted the new, late nineteenth-century trends in West African ethnic identity that culminated in the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance, many of these Brazilian Nagô travelers re-defined themselves as "Yoruba" and successfully offered their new ethnic identity as the preeminent local sign of black dignity in the face of white oppression. Parés believes that the sharp nosedive in the fortunes of the Jeje nation took place as a result of the Yoruba travelers' influence, which flourished in the 1890s.

However, I also show that a number of other influential travelers during this period were highly prosperous Bahian Jejes and, unacknowledged by Parés, that the founder of the two temples he studied appears to have participated actively in this transatlantic trade, contributing to what I describe as a "resurrection" of the Jeje nation in Bahia between the 1890s and the 1930s. The cosmopolitan experience, political consciousness, and economic strategies of these travelers notwithstanding, Parés is anxious to prove that

the transatlantic mobility of the period had no influence on the character of Bahian Jeje religion in the twentieth century. Parés describes the influence of the most prominent of the Jeje travelers as “tangential.” Parés overlooks—or tendentiously ignores—the oral historical reports of several of his tutors that even the founder of both the Bogum and the Seja Hundé temples traveled back and forth to Africa during this period. Instead, Parés chooses to give priority to a single present-day informant who denies that goods from the ongoing commerce with West Africa reached Cachoeira, the site of the Seja Hundé temple alone. Thus, against mounting evidence—even evidence that he himself can take credit for unearthing—Parés endeavors to preserve Herskovits’s model of African-American cultures’ emerging exclusively from a one-time transfer of African traits to the Americas, followed by their linear “survival” or dissipation.

Against the rising tide of Yoruba-centrism in Candomblé since the 1890s, Parés charges to the rescue of Candomblé’s Jeje nation, insisting on its foundational importance in the religion and advising the faithful on how they might yet rescue their beleaguered nation (p. 207). And he is determined to use only one weapon in his fight—the trope of “cultural memory.” His insistence on the exclusive use of Herskovitsian methods appears to be an artifact of the effort to isolate a distinctly Jeje contribution to Candomblé so that it cannot be mistaken for a product of the intercultural exchange that occurred after the arrival of the enslaved Africans in Brazil. He sharpens his call for the recognition of the Jejes’ singular importance and expounds on the originality of his point by selectively quoting colleagues to imply that they have all previously ignored or underestimated the importance of the Jeje nation (pp. 106, 207). I believe that Parés underestimates his predecessors’ insights.

Some of Parés’s predecessors in assessing the relative strength of the Jeje and Nagô nations during the 1860s, including Dale Graden and João José Reis, have employed the technique of counting the words from each language appearing in a range of publications and archives of that time, and those predecessors have found the Nagô nation slightly stronger. After a recount of these terms in only one of the available sources, the Afro-Brazilian satirical newspaper *O Alabama*, Parés argues that the Jeje nation was slightly stronger (p. 110), but there are reasons to question his sample. His own report that freed Jejes were over-represented in the urban areas (where *O Alabama* was written and published) and under-represented in the rural areas (where most of what he calls the “institutional” Candomblé temples were located) would suggest that his sample overestimates the Jejes’ role in the institutionalization of the Candomblé religion. Parés tells us that the practice of institutional Candomblé (as opposed to the practice of divination and healing by individuals and in family-based temples) was disproportionately the work of free, rural people. Ultimately, Parés seems to concede that the shift from Jeje dominance to Nagô dominance in Candomblé occurred only slightly later—perhaps up to 20 years later—than his fellow researchers have recognized. This discovery is valuable but is not the revolutionary overturning of conventional wisdom that Parés has promised.

To demonstrate the uniqueness and the importance of the Jeje contribution to Candomblé, Parés establishes for himself the requirement to prove that the Jeje nation

has a primordial West African antecedent that is culturally distinct from that of its West African neighbors. The antecedent as he presents it is an internally integrated system, not in any way influenced by European colonial invention or by Jeje returnee nationalism. As part of his proof, he must also establish that, from the time the Jejes' ancestors left Africa, they have continuously maintained a population, a social community, and a cultural norm distinct from those of neighboring Afro-Brazilian nations. He recognizes ultimately that Candomblé as a whole is a community, in which nations, or denominations, influence each other. So he must assert the fiction that all members of the Jeje nation agree, often in a secret way that they have gradually revealed to him, on the ritual and verbal diacritica that continue to distinguish their group from others.

Through most of the book, the integrity of this group is said to rely solely on the "memory" and "preservation" of complex configurations of belief and practice (each one of which he calls a "local cult complex") brought by specific priests who came from specific towns in West Africa (pp. 103, 204, 221, 229, 286, 271). These precise configurations of belief and practice were so well preserved that Parés can describe in detail a stereotyped ritual of which he witnessed instances in Bahia in the twenty-first-century and then describe in detail a stereotyped ritual he once witnessed in Benin Republic. And there you have it, he declares: we have found "obvious antecedents" of the twenty-first-century Brazilian ritual in the twenty-first-century Beninese ritual, and "elements stemming from" the latter in the former (p. 294). He says that he is not hunting for Africanisms or for cultural survivals, but this is precisely what he does. He says that he does not aim to "purify" or "reify" a single standard of Jeje religious practice, but this is precisely what he does. This method is, by the way, highly inconsistent with Fredrik Barth's view of the arbitrary and protean nature of the cultural diacritica that distinguish one ethnic group from another (Barth, 1969; see also Cohen 1969).

According to Parés's model, cultural history seems to have stood still in the Gbè-speaking region since the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade: ethnographic accounts from twentieth-century West Africa and Parés's own field observations in the twenty-first century can be taken as a litmus test for what Bahian Jejes have, since their arrival in Brazil in the nineteenth century, variously "forgotten" or "remembered." And, despite the plain evidence that ritual complexes spread and die out in response to the prestige enjoyed by the temples and the nation that sponsors them, Parés expresses doubt that the ritual practices of a Bahian temple change over time in response to any surrounding discourse, priestly strategy, or political motive, or in response to the influence of travelers or even the experience of travel. However, he innocently describes the new iconographic priorities enacted by Manuel Falefá after his twentieth-century voyages to West Africa (p. 202; compare pp. 239–240), not realizing that this example undermines his overall argument about the immutability of Afro-Brazilian religious practice over time.

Parés's strongest case for the clear transfer and wholesale preservation of a local cult complex from one specific West African locale to a specific Brazilian locale (this would be the strongest proof positive of the virtues of Herskovits's method) is, at best, vague

and weak (see pp. 271–277). Yet Parés repeatedly and forcefully argues this case in the body of his text. He often identifies the origin of a local Bahian cult complex in the local cult complex specific to Abomey or Ouidah (on p. 231, for example), but he never explores the question of why the priests of the “Mahi” sub-nation who came to Bahia, and whose preservationist descendants now reportedly dominate the Jeje nation there, would abandon the local cult complex of the West African “Mahi” people in favor of the local cult complex of the Abomey and Ouidah peoples, who had kidnapped, enslaved and sold the “Mahis” to European merchants.

The model of Jeje “memory” and “persistence” rests upon a number of dubious methodological moves. First, despite Parés’s denials that he is doing so, he posits a single standard type of belief and ritual practice that is Jeje and not Nagô, refusing to acknowledge that the definition of ethnic and sectarian diacritica is always a matter of debate and is indeed a major idiom of internecine rivalry. Among the diacritica that Parés and his tutors attribute to the Jeje nation are the worship of the god Legba (which he says is in opposition to the worship of the Nagô god Exú, as it had also been opposite “in Africa”) and of the god “Ogun Xoroque” [sic], as well as the practice of a ritual called *zandrô*.

When Parés’s tutors question another priest’s ritual competency (that is, the priest’s conformity to the standards and diacritica stipulated by the speaker), Parés seems to trust that the speaker truly possesses superior knowledge and a more accurate memory of the nation’s past. He fails to consider the possibility that the speaker might be engaging in strategic invention, manipulation, or the innovative application of recently invented rules. I am particularly troubled by Parés’s lack of scholarly skepticism about these partisan definitions of legitimate membership in the Jeje nation because the diacritica that he and his main tutors describe as definitive contradict the practices of the Jeje temple where Parés’s and my research have overlapped for decades. In the Jeje-Savalú temple known to both of us—perhaps the most celebrated Jeje temple in Salvador today—the priests conduct several practices that contradict the diacritica that Parés says define membership in the Jeje nation. The priests *do* sacrifice rams, they *do* perform a ritual similar to the Waters of Oxalá, and they *do* confer the *decá* (the calabash certificate of priestly independence); moreover, they do *not* make offerings in bags, they do *not* worship Ogun Xoroquê, and so forth. Parés’s campaign to establish the discreteness of the Jeje nation and to restore its dignity in a Nagô/Yoruba-centric age thus requires him to excommunicate the nation’s most prestigious temple today.

The Formation of Candomblé reads like a book that began as an attempt at an objectivist history: it is full of references to impressive survivals, retentions, memories, relics, resonances, correspondences, transferences, traces, vestiges, preservation, persistence, continuity, derivation adaptations, reinterpretations, phonetic evolutions, and corruptions and deformations of originally African forms (this largely Herskovitsian vocabulary is regularly employed without apology by Parés and his co-translator) in the Bahian Jeje nation. As suggested by this vocabulary, the main mechanisms of cultural reproduction in this account are passive, despite brief and grudging confessions of

borrowing across the boundaries between nations and of pursuing prestige through the imitation of higher-profile nations and temples.

It is telling that the author consistently chooses to describe the planning and conduct of ritual activities in terms of “memory” and “forgetting,” rather than “commemoration” or thoughtful “choice,” terms that would, in my view, better reflect the sort of agency that shapes human action. The diversity of initiation procedures, related to the spiritual and material needs of the person being initiated, is mentioned abstractly, but there is no discussion of why people get initiated or how any particular ceremony addresses the aspirations of particular participants. I suspect that the anonymous readers for the press responded with numerous criticisms about the outmodedness and explanatory insufficiency of the original manuscript’s Herskovitsian theory of cultural history. Parés’s extensive quotation of my work on the influence of the free Afro-Brazilian travelers from the early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century seems tacked on, and even that ambivalently so. The book pays little or no attention to the effects of white power and racial politics in Bahia. Overall, the analysis seems impervious to the idea that anything but the “memory” or the “forgetting” of practices brought over during the slave trade could be important in the “formation of Candomblé.”

ORTHOGRAPHY AND THE FORMATION OF CULTURAL HISTORY

Even as a defense of Herskovitsian methods, this study is marred by such carelessness with orthography that it is difficult to know how to pronounce the Gbè, Yoruba, Jeje, and Nagò words in the text. After all, phonetic similarity, as the basis for inferences about the etymological connection between two words recorded in different places and times, is the linchpin of Parés’s study of the cultural persistence of Candomblé’s nations—nations that Parés emphasizes are language-based. The appropriate accents have been omitted from an astonishing number of words, and where they are employed, it is often unclear that Parés has heard or properly transcribed the difference between an open *e* and a closed *e*, which is important in all of these languages. So, for example, he affirms that the Jeje thunder god *Badé* (pronounced, as in Portuguese orthography, with an open *e*) has been associated with the Bahian green corn festival because the word for corn in Fon, one of the Gbè languages, is *gbadé* (the word appears to be written in a French-influenced version of Fon orthography, in which the acute accent indicates a closed *e*). It is unclear whether Parés or the Brazilian author he cites to infer this previously unnoticed “African survival” is aware of this orthographic dissimilarity between French and Portuguese. Conversely, there is a case in which Parés may be mistaking a divergent transcription for a difference of pronunciation, or “phonetic evolution.” The *g* in “*gumbono*” and the “*h*” in “*humbono*” may be orthographically diverse attempts to record the Gbè glottal fricative (p. 109).

Similarly, Parés consistently leaves the circumflex accent out of the name “Ogun Xoroquê.” Many misspellings here are simply mistakes, often resulting from Spanish language interference in the interpretation of Brazilian words, as in *axexé* for *axexê*

(p. 165), *malé* for *malê* (p. 128), *Kpo* for *Pó* (p. 187), *padé* for *padê* (in several places), and *Huassas* for *Hausas* (p. 136). Indeed, the spelling of any given word within a single locale sometimes varies from one part of Parés's text to another. For example, he promises at the outset to use English-language orthography to transcribe West African place names, but in actuality he follows no rule. He sometimes writes *Oyó* (the Portuguese transcription of the Yoruba *Oyo*) instead of *Oyo*, the English-language transcription (p. 216). On the other hand, he often imposes Brazilian spellings on a similar West African referent, as in *Oyó* for *Oyo*, *Xangó* for *Sango* and *Ifé* for *Ifè*. He at times imposes the West African spelling on the Brazilian referent, as in *Ketu* for *Quêto*. Numerous typographical or translation errors in proper names and non-European languages go unchecked, such as *Caribé* for *Carybé*, *zeleins* for *zelins* (p. 175), *avô funfun* for *axó funfun* (p. 278), *Obá . . . Oyesis Xagulan* (p. 188) for I dare not guess what. There is also the translation of the Yoruba possessive pronoun *yin* as "of all," rather than as "your" in the plural or respectful sense (p. 231). Given these translation and perhaps editing issues, I am not certain whether the diviner Agenor Miranda Rocha is being described as an *olowo* (p. 189), which in West African Yoruba means a rich person, or as an *oluwo*, which in Yoruba means a master diviner. *Olowo* may, in this case, be a typographical error or a correct transcription of a distinctly Brazilian Nagô title.

However, if there is a pattern, it is that Parés's orthography follows his methodological bias. He seems to favor transcriptions that conceal the phonetic, phonemic, and orthographic differences between geographically and linguistically separate populations. In sum, his orthography often exaggerates continuities and conceals differences between West African and Brazilian phenomena. Hence, many Brazilian words lose the accents that in both scholarly and popular Brazilian writing always mark the stress pattern of the word: *Omólú* becomes *Omolu*, *Odé* becomes *Ode*, *Curuzú* becomes *Curuzu*, *Tayá* becomes *Taya*, *abará* becomes *abara*, *carurú* becomes *caruru*, and so forth. Most West African languages do not employ syllabic stress meaningfully or mark it orthographically, so without the accents on their final syllables these Brazilian words look more African.

The *x* that normally appears in the West African ethnonym *Maxi* is a glottal trill. Its Bahian cognate *Marrim* is pronounced with a glottal fricative. Parés usually transcribes both sounds as *h*, making these sounds look much more similar than they are, but he does not follow this orthographic practice consistently. For example, he retains the *r* as the glottal fricative in naming the *rum*, *rumpi*, and *runle* drums (p. 107). His frequent use of an English-type *h* to represent the Brazilian glottal fricative looks especially odd when juxtaposed with Brazilian proper names in the text, in which Parés retains the Brazilian convention of representing the glottal fricative with *r* at the beginning of words and *rr* in the middle. For example, we might see on the same page (for example, p. 183) the Brazilian name *Runhó* and the Anglicized Brazilian word *hunsó*, in which the *R* and the *h* represent the same sound. In normal Brazilian orthography, the *h* is silent. Consequently, the reader is left without a clue as to the pronunciation of the second word in *Seja Hundé*, the name of one of the two temples central to this study. Is the *H* a glottal fricative, or is it silent? Is the final *e* open or closed?

These errors and unsystematic transcriptions may appear minor, but they instantiate a broader ethnographic neglect or suppression of the systematic differences among different regional traditions of religious parlance and practice and within the same regional tradition over time. Overall, such neglect and suppression not only make it impossible for the reader to decode the pronunciation of religious words in their actual ethnographic contexts but also undermine the reliability of Parés's narration of cultural history. Such transcriptions often efface evidence of systemic differences between any given Brazilian unit of religious meaning and its apparent West African counterpart, as well as the history of that unit's transposition from one place to another and, therefore, of its resignification. For example, the goddess Oxum in Brazil and goddess Ochún in Cuba are often described as *mulatas*, a positional category external to the usual Nigerian Yoruba conceptualization of the goddess Oṣun. Moreover, while they all love the color yellow, the Brazilian Oxum and the Cuban Ochún favor gold over all other metals, while Nigerian Oṣun favors brass and likes green as much as yellow. And, whereas Oxum and Ochún are goddesses of all bodies of fresh water (in contrast to the sea goddesses Iemanjá [Brazil] and Yemayá [Cuba]), Oṣun is the goddess of one specific eponymous river in Nigeria and Yemoja is the goddess of another specific river in Nigeria.

In keeping with the predominant pattern of orthographic Africanization and with his Herskovitsian methodological priorities, the name of the Brazilian god Leba is transcribed as *Legba*, which is the norm in Fongbè and other Beninese Gbè languages. However, *gb* is not a recognized phoneme in Brazilian Jeje or Portuguese, and I have never heard it pronounced in the speaking of this Brazilian god's name. It normally comes out more like a double *b*. Similarly, Parés spells Ogun with an *n*, rather than an *m*; the latter is the norm in Brazil. Spelling Ogun with an *n* dramatizes the assumption that the contemporary West African spelling (which is actually a product of mid-nineteenth century Yoruba Christian missionaries' reduction of their languages to writing) is the primordial African norm of which the Brazilian spelling is a "survival" and later "corruption." In fact, the orthographies employed in and around any given African diaspora religion do change over time, sometimes giving evidence of ongoing transnational influences upon local thought and practice. Indeed, Parés's redemptionist writing is an example of this phenomenon. However, his personal policy of Anglicizing and Africanizing the received orthography also distorts the body of ethnographic evidence and replaces it with Parés's own Herskovitsian and Africanizing preferences.

The most glaring error resulting from Parés's smudging out of orthographic and ethnographic differences among places and across time is his handling of the hybrid confabulation he calls "Ogun Xoroque." As far as I am aware, there is no god known as "Ogun Xoroque" or "Ogum Xoroqué" in West Africa. Indeed, my Bahian Jeje sources suggest that it is an invention from Rio de Janeiro, more characteristic of the self-consciously hybrid Umbanda religion than of Candomblé. So, it is not clear why Parés represents "Ogun Xoroque" in Bahia as an African survival that proves the continuity of "memory" between the religiosity of the West African Gbè speakers and that of the Bahian Jejes.

EVOLUTIONISM AND DIFFUSIONISM IN THE DEFENSE OF JEJE DIGNITY

Parés's Herskovitsian method is also contradicted by his own dubious evolutionist assumption that Candomblé in Bahia evolved from individual to domestic and then to "institutional" and "ecclesiastical" practices. Without recognizing their contrary implications, he tells many stories of people such as Romaninha de Pó who served as officials in "institutional" temples and then set out as individual practitioners, and of institutional temples (such as Bogum) whose succession practices later became familial. At one point, following a non-evolutionary model, Parés infers that individual practice may have been the cultural preference of the west-central African "Angola" nation, which distinguished it from the West African Jejes and their Brazilian co-ethnics, who reportedly felt a cultural preference for "institutional" practice. But he fails to explain how this cultural difference between West-Central Africans and West Africans, as well as their co-ethnics in Bahia, fits into his "evolutionary" model of the emergence of "institutional" Candomblé.

Employing Herskovits's model, Parés argues that the multi-deity, institutionalized temple was a Jeje cultural disposition absent among the West African ancestors of the Nagôs until 1848, nearly the end of the Atlantic slave trade, with the founding of the Ayede kingdom in the Ekiti region (p. 213). As further proof of the Jejes' degree of influence in Bahia, Parés asserts that all Candomblé temples hosted the worship of multiple deities by the *end* of the nineteenth century, implying that other Afro-Bahian nations had acquired this Jeje disposition only in the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, Parés fails to explain why the model of the multi-deity, institutional temple did not emerge in Bahia with the eighteenth-century arrival of the Jejes, while they were the most clearly dominant nation, rather than after more than a hundred years of "evolution." In fact, contrary to Parés's argument, the aggregation of multiple gods in the palace and in domestic shrines—and the articulation of family relationships among them—are all ancient phenomena among the ancestors of the Yoruba and the Nagôs. Parés's inference to the contrary seems to result from his own limited command of the West Africanist ethnography.

In a further bid to demonstrate the discreteness and dignity of the Bahian Jeje nation, he endeavors to delay the date of Nagô influence on Jeje religion by stating that the penetration of the Nagô goddesses was "increasing" between 1913 and 1920 (p. 226), based on the fact that half the possession priestesses in the two Jeje temples he studied were by then consecrated to Nagô goddesses. Parés insinuates, rather than proves, that this penetration was lower during the 1860s, the time when the Jeje temples had last been carefully documented.

On the following page, he attempts again to diminish the extent of Nagô influence on the Jeje nation, even during the post-abolition period, by insisting that the towering role of the Nagô goddesses in the Jeje temples during the early twentieth century "reflects or expresses . . . not the interethnic interactions of the religious experts, as

in the case of the juxtaposition of the [Jeje-]Mundubi and [Jeje-]Mahi voduns, but alterations in the proportions of the gender of the participants and, more important, the congregations' leadership" (p. 227). This claim that Jeje and Nagô priests did not interact extensively throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries belies all of the evidence that Parés has so carefully documented. It is true that the version of Jeje religion that Parés presents has few goddesses. But who says that female devotees and priestesses of religions with few goddesses require goddesses or even favor goddesses over gods? Parés's nationalistic desire to prove that the Jeje nation was autonomous and that its character was self-determined until the post-abolition period runs up against all of the facts he has presented. And it is unsupported by the universalizing premises about gender and religion that he implicitly invokes.

In his attempt to highlight the implications of his important historical research for the theorization of cultural history, Parés's over-zealous defense of the most extreme version of Herskovits's method is a grave weakness. Implicitly, he stands in resistance to the trend in Brazilian scholarship, prevalent since the 1980s, to attribute a great deal of Candomblé practice to standards imposed by white elites who were in the position to grant sponsorship and protection from the police to temples that obeyed their will (for example, Dantas, 1987). However, Parés gives little explicit attention to these arguments. He is also reacting, without citation, against my argument (Matory, 1999b; 2005) that free Afro-Brazilian travelers from the early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century exercised influence by bringing new ideas and exercising authority that changed Brazilian priests' thoughts about themselves, their practices, and the meanings they have since attributed to those practices. At the margins of his text, Parés cites my arguments with approval; however, he asserts repeatedly that the influence of these travelers on religious practice—as opposed to “the discourses, values, ideas, and collective identities” that turn around religious practice—was minimal (Parés, 2005; 2013, *Formation*, p. 240).

Through most of the text, Parés has forcefully asserted the primordial distinctness of the Jeje nation from all others and its relative imperviousness to their influence. However, his conclusion severely scales back these claims. He says that the diacritical practices of today's Jeje nation include a few survivals from the religious culture of the Gbè speakers, among them the allegedly primordial contrast between the West African god “Legba” and the West African god “Exú” [sic]; the worship of “Ogun Xoroque” [sic] (though he does not specify the West African precedent of “Ogun Xoroque”); the Bahian Jeje use of red-dyed straw in the woven suits of some manifest gods (again, he does not specify the West African precedent); and the Bahian *zandrô* ritual, whose similarities to the West African counterpart that Parés witnessed in the twenty-first century he describes most equivocally. Parés then lists an equal number of diacritica identified by priests of the Bahian Jeje nation that he believes have no African precedent: the *boitá* ritual, the giving of fruit to the sacred Azonado (or Azonodo) tree; and the pride of place that the Bahian Jejes give to the celebratory bonfire on the eve of Saint John's Day (June 24). He also lists a number of practices that he believes the Jejes contributed to the general body of Candomblé practices but have since not only “forgotten” but

also declared anathema to their own practice, among them the *decá* and the *panã* rituals.

Yet Parés maintains that certain ritual and organizational practices that he regards as unique to the Gbè speakers have had a foundational and indelible—but too often overlooked—influence on the Candomblé religion. First there is the “altar-offering complex” (that is, the making of “animal sacrifices and ritual food offerings on altars dedicated to the gods”), which he had previously described not as distinctly Gbè but as “the base of African religiosity, especially that of the West African traditions” (pp. 81–82, 295). Second, there are the collective initiations in which people undergoing initiation receive a ritual name in accordance with the order in which they are possessed by their gods. This phenomenon has long been recognized by most scholars and practitioners of Candomblé as a distinctly Jeje contribution to that religion. Third, there is the worship of multiple gods in the same temple, which, as I have shown, was not in fact unique to the Bahian Jejes or their West African co-ethnics.

THE FREE TRANS-ATLANTIC TRAVELERS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE TERM “JEJE”

Parés agrees with me about the historical character, as opposed to the primordially, of Yoruba supremacy and of matriarchy in Candomblé. We agree that not all of Herskovits’s observations need to be thrown out the window. But we disagree about the degree to which “religious practices” are shaped by “the discourses, values, ideas, and collective identities” around them, and we disagree about the degree to which anything more than continuous “memory,” and the involuntary lapse (or “forgetting”) thereof, have shaped the sacred parlance and the liturgical and iconographic choices of Candomblé priests.

For example, the travels of Jeje priests and of their gods back and forth between Africa and Brazil during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a repeated theme in the testimonies of Parés’s mentors (for example, pp. 140, 144, 145, 201–202, 281, 328 n112). Equally important is the report that the most important figure in the founding of both Bogum and Seja Hundé, Ludovina Pessoa (p. 138) directed a temple and commercial operation (Casa Estrela, or Casa da Estrela) that marketed African goods shipped by the owners’ close relatives from West Africa and sold them to customers in both Salvador and the nearby Recôncavo region (Matory, 2005, pp. 100, 310–11 n21; Parés, pp. 140, 328 n112). At most, Herskovits and his followers have been able to recognize the “preservative” or “restorative” effect of such journeys, but they are loath to recognize their transformative effects.

In a further example of his resistance to non-linear models of diasporic cultural history, Parés offers a counter-explanation of a chain of conundra that I lay out in an article (Matory, 1999c) and in my book *Black Atlantic Religion*. First, the earliest written mention of the Jeje ethnonym appears in Brazil in 1711, 153 years before its first appearance in the extensive historiography of the West African Gulf of Guinea (Matory,

2005, pp. 299–300; Parés, *Formation*, p. 24). Researchers have spent over a century trying to guess the etymological origins of the term, but the leading lexicographer of Fon (the major Gbè language spoken in the region that Parés identifies as the Jejes' point of embarkation in Africa) altogether denies that the term "Jeje" originated in Fon. Parés thinks the term "Jeje" comes from either "Idjè" the "localized area between [the towns of] Pobé and Kétou, to the north of Porto-Novo" (p. 28) or from "Adjaché," the "capital of a region that the Oyo called Adjaché-Ipo, an area to which the Adja of Allada fled following the conquest of their kingdom by the armies of [Dahomean king] Agaja in 1724" (p. 29). He favors the notion that "Jeje" came from "Adjaché" (p. 28), before the founding of the city of Porto-Novo, and that this ethnonym must have been applied for the first time to all of the Gbè speakers by "Bahian traders" to designate the enslaved people who embarked at Ouidah, even though in West Africa the term "remained restricted to [the description of] the Gun of the kingdom of Porto-Novo" (p. 29). Like ethnologist and psychiatrist Nina Rodrigues before him, Parés seems unaware of the radical differences among the unsystematically transcribed phonemes in the chain of transformations that he guesses led from "Adjaché" to "Jeje" (p. 29). Between these two words, there is hardly a single phoneme in common. "Idjè" is equally distant in pronunciation from "Jeje." It is an equally improbable etymological origin of the term "Jeje."

Nor does Parés seem to be puzzled by two important facts. One is that the origins of the ethnonym "Jeje" are far more obscure than those of similarly important ethnonyms, and the other is that the term is applied to these populations nowhere else in the Americas. He also ignores documentation that the term did not simply "*remain* restricted to the Gun of Porto-Novo" [emphasis mine]—as though we could take it for granted that the term had, in West Africa, *previously* and *always* been restricted to the Gun of Porto-Novo. In fact, the first appearance of this term in West Africa in anything phonetically similar to its present form ("Djédji," in the orthography of French missionaries and colonial officers) occurred only *after* thousands of Brazilian Jejes had "returned" to West Africa, and it first appeared *in the writings of Europeans who were being hosted by these Brazilian returnees*. It had never appeared in the scores of publications by European traders who had visited the region since the fifteenth century. At the time that French missionaries and colonial officers first penned the term in West Africa, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term referred to *all* of the Gbè speakers, not just to the "Gun of Porto-Novo." Only because the return of Brazilian Jejes was focused on Porto-Novo did the term Djedji *eventually shrink* in scope to refer chiefly to the Porto-Novo people. Then, amid shifting cultural and political alliances, it disappeared altogether as an ethnonym in West Africa (Matory, 2005, pp. 76–85).

On the contrary, Parés postulates, in a manner uniquely conceivable through his analytical model, the following unsubstantiated conclusion:

Given that the use of the ethnonym was common among slave traders and owners, as well as among Africans themselves, it is more likely that, despite the lack of documentation, the term *Jeje* originated in Africa, as happens with almost all other

denominations of African ethnic identities in Brazil. More precisely, one could hypothesize that it resulted from a Portuguese adaption [sic] of some African term by Bahian slave traders (p. 25).

If Portuguese or Bahian slave traders or owners anywhere outside of Brazil commonly used this term, Parés provides no evidence of it. Nor has he shown that any “Africans” outside of Brazil employed the term. It is true that “almost all other denominations of African ethnic identities in Brazil” have clear and obvious precedents in Africa, but why is it inconceivable that this one denomination, uniquely difficult to find in Africa and found nowhere else in the Americas, originated in Bahia? Maybe, as Parés insists, the term “Jeje” did ultimately come from some obscure and rare form of West African parlance, but his hypothesis rests less on evidence than on the article of faith that African diasporic history always (and only) works as a time-limited, outward flow of culture and identities from the homeland, their gradual adaptation to the new place, and, usually, their eventual disappearance through forgetting. There is already too much historical evidence to the contrary for us to leave the matter at that.

Whether or not the term “Jeje” originated in some obscure West African reference, as Parés insists, it is clear that its current pronunciation and its application to all of the Gbè speakers and their descendants originated in Brazil, and that the tracking down of its ultimate African origin has borne little fruit. Even if we could pin down an origin in a minute hermetically bounded corner of precolonial Africa, there remains much more in the history of this Brazilian ethnonym, its usage, and its strategic application that deserves to be explained.

The same can be said for the name “Mundubi,” which describes the Jeje sub-nation and ritual protocols that focus on the worship of the god of thunder, “Sogbo” (Parés’s African-survivalist transcription of the Bahian Jeje term “Sobô”). Parés reports that Mundubi is also “an ethnic denomination recorded in the first decades of the nineteenth century” (p. 221), rather late, one might note, in the recorded history of the Jeje nation in Brazil. Instead of examining the archives to discover when, where, how, and by whom the term Mundubi came to be used in Brazil, in West Africa, and in between, Parés again resorts to a Herskovitsian article of faith: that what matters is where in Africa the term “originates.” Thus, he concludes, “The hegemony held by the thunder voduns [over the sea gods] reproduces the pattern found in Abomey . . . (and not the inverse, prevalent in Ouidah), which might suggest the identification of the term *Mundubi* with groups from these areas” (p. 221).

This unilinear model of Gbè-Jeje cultural history ignores the centrality of the thunder god in the Oyo empire, which long dominated the Abomey kingdom; the centrality of the thunder god in Bahian Candomblé Nagô; the likely influence of the Oyo Empire on the changing liturgical priorities of the West African Gbè speakers; and the also likely impact of Candomblé Nagô on the liturgical priorities of the Brazilian Jejes. Parés’s unilinear, Jeje-isolationist model renders impossible or uninteresting the possibility that, wherever it came from etymologically or geographically, the term “Mundubi” could have acquired a new semantic life in the production of distinctions far more salient

in Brazil than in West Africa. His model requires us to assume that the term was the “memory” of an African value, preserved simply because it was inherited from an early temple-founder who was born in the Mundubi section of the Jeje “culture area”—and that this is enough to say. Alternatively, whether or not the term was ever the self-reference of a subset of the Gbè speakers in Africa, the term “Mundubi” may have become useful in the multi-pronged power struggle that Parés describes so perspicaciously among dominated minorities: simultaneously to imitate the dominant power and to assert politically or economically useful differences by naming, isolating, limiting, and even derogating the signs of influence by the dominant Other. The term “Mundubi” marks—whether for potential praise, identification, or derogation—the worship of the Jeje god most closely associated with the Yoruba and the Nagô.

According to Parés, the “kingship” of the Jeje nation is divided among three kings—the snake god (Dan or Bessen), the Thunder God (Sogbo, Hevioso, or Kaviano), and the Smallpox God (Azonsu, Sakpata, or Omolú)—whose relative authority is debated. Some Jeje devotees assign preeminence to the snake god, others to the Thunder God (p. 214), and others still to Omolú (p. 204). The name “Mundubi” might well represent a Nagô-associated faction in a struggle—not between the Abomey-associated thunder gods and the Ouidah-associated sea gods, in terms of which Parés defines much variation among Gbè local cult complexes—but between the thunder-associated forces of Abomey and Nagô imperialism, on the one hand, and the subordinated Maxi, or Marrim, and Ouidah-based devotees of the Smallpox God and the Serpent God, on the other. I will return to this point in the discussion of why Afro-Bahian Jeje-Marrim (that is, non-Ouidah) merchants returning to the coast might have chosen to elevate the snake god in a symbolic alliance with the coastal kingdom of Ouidah.

There is a second set of paradoxes that his Herskovitsian model compels Parés to ignore. Both of us have discovered archival and historical evidence that Bahian Jeje institutions passed through long periods of quiescence and virtual invisibility to the public between 1870 and the 1890s, and during the 1920s and early 1930s as well (Matory, 2005, pp. 310–311 n21). Moreover, this quiescence, which Parés attributes partially to succession struggles, was also clearly an element of the absolute and relative decline of the Jeje nation. I noticed that the twentieth-century re-Africanization of Candomblé Nagô and the revival of the Jeje nation coincided with the period when prosperous Nagô and Jeje pilgrims and merchants were traveling back and forth between Brazil and the West African coast. Among them, according to my research and Parés’s as well, were the foremothers of both Bogum and Seja Hundé and their relatives. If my hypothesis is correct, the Jeje and the Nagô transatlantic merchants were engaged in a battle for relative prestige, which impinged equally on the relative value of their African merchandise and of their priestly leadership and services. My argument is that these struggles enhanced the diacritical value of the snake god in the Jeje nation.

During the 1930s, amid the resurrection of the Bogum and Seja Hundé temples, as well as a general upsurge in the activities of self-proclaimed Jeje temples unprecedented since 1870, we also see a proliferation of images of the snake god in the paraphernalia and on the walls of the Jeje temples (Matory, 2005, pp. 101–102; Parés, p. 202). Among

the reasons that I connect this upsurge in snake imagery to the ongoing transatlantic trade is that there is also a great upsurge during the 1930s in the use of the name “Dan,” or “Dā,” to refer to the snake god. In the Marrim-dominated Jeje nation of Brazil, which had long employed the name “Bessen,” or “Bessem,” the popularity of the term “Dan,” or “Dā,” was a novelty. Moreover, the snake had never enjoyed the same pride of place in the Maxi region of the West African hinterland (the homeland of the Brazilian Jeje-Marrins) that it acquired in the coastal city of Ouidah, where, as Parés points out, it was closely associated with the pursuit of wealth through the Atlantic trade. However, the Brazilian Marrins who were “returning” to West Africa did not typically go back to the hinterland villages of their Maxi forebears. Instead, they returned to the coast, where trade with Europeans had long been a central element of Dahomey’s effort to throw off Oyo’s imperial yoke. As the Jeje Marrim “returnees” cultivated a pan-Gbè identity in contrast to the Oyo-associated pan-Yoruba and Nagô identities, there is every reason to believe that the snake god—and the name of that god preferred in the coastal capital of snake worship, “Dan”—would rise to prominence as a banner of Brazilian Jeje distinction.

Parés’s reply is predictably primordialist, supposing that things are what they are today simply because they have always been so and because nothing has changed. He says that there had long been a snake god called “Bessen” in the Bogum and Seja Hundé temples. Moreover, during his twenty-first-century research in Bahia, Parés was told that “Bessen” is the “spiritual master” of these temples, leading him to infer that “Bessen” had always been these temples’ reigning vodun, since in his view a temple never changes its “spiritual master.” Parés contradicts himself as he tells the story that the successor of Jeje priest Manuel Falefá *did* in fact change the reigning god of his temple (pp. 202–203). However, the fact that some temples do change their reigning god is not my main point. Rather, the point is that priests are not simply slaves to tradition. Rather, like every other political actor, priests can re-signify old practices and selectively prioritize some aspects of the inherited legacy over others. Sometimes they even invent new traditions. On the other hand, Parés seems determined, on point of theoretical principle, to deny the possibility of such conscious agency and reform in sacred belief and practice.

Like a leader in any other field, the leader of a temple can, in the interest of secrecy or in pursuit of prestige, variously highlight or hide all sorts of truths, such as whether he or she worships the controversial *caboclo* Indian spirits, whose activities can famously give a quick, inexpensive boost to the material fortunes of a small temple. However, the caboclos are despised by the arbiters of African purity and prestige, so the caboclos tend to be hidden and denied by priests pursuing the higher ranks of prestige and state or bourgeois sponsorship in the Candomblé world. These decisions about self-presentation are subject to fashion and strategy, and the decoration of public portions of a temple often quickly reveals these conscious choices.

Parés adds to his criticism of my argument the assertion that “Mahi” people in West Africa have also long worshipped the snake god, but in doing so he does not contradict

my point. My point concerns *the prominence and the diacritical role of that liturgical practice in the collective identities that distinguish one population from another*, not the mere *existence* of a liturgical practice in a population. The difference between the role and the prominence of snake worship in Ouidah and in Maxi country is significant.

The fact is that the Jeje (and Nagô) travelers were almost always “returning” to parts of West Africa other than those from which their biological and priestly forebears had come. And the Africa to which they returned had changed substantially in the decades, and sometimes even centuries, since their forebears had left for Brazil. So, naturally, the free travelers brought back new information from their pilgrimages to the motherland. In addition, the traveling Jejes had new motives in selecting and using the new information. For example, there is good reason to believe that the project of distinguishing the Jeje-Marrim merchants and their allies from Nagô/Yoruba merchants and their allies became important on the commercial axis between Lagos and Bahia in ways that this distinction had never been important in the interior homeland of the Maxi ancestors of the Marrins. In Bahia, Nagô/Yoruba and Jeje-Marrim merchants were selling essentially the same products, and each could benefit from the deft assertion of ethnic distinction.

Parés usefully applies some of Barth’s ideas to the dynamics of ethnic identity within Bahian society. He also alerts us, intelligently, to the precolonial migrations that may have produced diverse “local cult complexes” in the Gbè-speaking region of West Africa. But he seems to have difficulty conceiving of the possibility that Africans and Afro-Brazilians may, since then, have made decisions about their self-presentations and their ritual conduct based on psychological mechanisms, socioeconomic motives, or theological cogitations other than lineally and passively inherited “memory.” And he cavils at the thought that any given Bahian Jeje temple or priest might have had more religious material to work with than the unchanging configurations of vocabulary and practices that the temple’s founder brought over when delivered as a slave to Brazil.

Parés’s deep and richly textured micro-history is a major scholarly contribution. However, his surprisingly old-fashioned diffusionist and evolutionary theoretical framework flattens priestly agency and expressly denies the power of multidirectional transnational flows of people and ideas to reshape African and African-diaspora cultures at their cores. Every other religion in the world hosts rivalries among leaders that find ritual and symbolic expression in reform movements with corollaries in competing interests and new revelations or discoveries. Every other religion has been shaped by the multicultural and multi-religious dialogues in which it is involved. Partly for these reasons, every other religion changes over time. However, Parés’s model relies on the assumption that African-diaspora religions are uniquely frozen in time and immune to the conscious decisions of thoughtful leaders. All that these religious leaders seem able to do is “remember” or “forget.”

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LUIS NICOLAU PARÉS: REPLY TO THE REVIEW OF J. LORAND MATORY
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By Luis Nicolau Parés

Professor J. Lorand Matory's thorough critique of the English translation of my book, which was first published in Brazil in 2006, did not come to me as a complete surprise. He and I have known each other for some years, and we have shared with each other interests in the cultural history of Candomblé, in particular the place and role of the Jeje nation. We have discussed our interpretative divergences in private and in public, and I have referred to some of them in writing (*Nagôization*, 2005; *Birth*, 2005; *Formation*). I do appreciate and feel honored that such a distinguished scholar has devoted some of his precious time to reviewing my book, giving me the chance to revisit my over-a-decade-old argument in the light of his provoking challenges. Yet, after reading his essay (certainly more than a standard review), I wondered why he had taken the effort to write 15 single-spaced pages of meticulous criticism on a work he ultimately dismisses as theoretically old-fashioned and full of errors and inconsistencies. If it is so worthless, why care about it in the first place?

In this sense I much appreciate the editors of *The Americas* giving me the opportunity to reply. There is no way I can answer all the issues raised by Matory's review, so I will focus on those I judge to be most relevant for advancing our debates concerning Afro-