

binary gender off the hook. She offers a condemnation of the binary through her reading of the Torah, which presents patriarchy as a curse on everyone. She writes, "Though patriarchy is the final step in the biblical genesis of gender, it is presented not as an inevitable outgrowth of inherent differences between males and females but as the unforeseen tragic consequence of human violation of God's command . . ." (29). In other words, Ladin suggests that a binary relationship between (cis) men and women, rooted in patriarchy, does not exemplify God's desire for an exclusively cisgender and heterosexual humankind (as some argue). On the contrary, patriarchy should be understood as a *punishment from God*.

Ladin's book is powerful in part because she is unafraid to claim her tradition. As I mentioned at the start, religious and transgender identities are often expected to be in tension with one another. This premise can make it unlikely for trans people to explore their religious traditions with the confidence and curiosity that Ladin displays. In owning her tradition, she is able to illuminate what lies within it in new ways, providing enriching interpretations of the Torah. Her book is relevant to all in part because the influence of normative, binary gender is widely felt. We witness this in the frequency of people who are pregnant being asked, "Is it a boy or a girl?" Ladin argues that one of the reasons people commonly inquire about the gender of an unborn child is because gender still dictates so much of what will be possible for that child throughout their life. Ladin's work has the potential to help disrupt these norms, reminding those for whom theology rooted in the Torah/Hebrew Bible is a powerful guide that God created human beings without gender, without any specific expectations based on their sex. It is human beings who have been complicating things ever since.

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The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make. By J. Lorand Matory. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2018. 392 pages. \$104.95 (cloth), \$28.95 (paperback).

J. Lorand Matory's *The Fetish Revisited* is a masterful work, stunning in its erudition, ambitious argument, and prodigious ethnographic detail. That Marx and Freud made use of the idea of the "fetish" to develop their theories – of a "secret" value in socio-economics, and as an uncanny "affective ambivalence" at play in the psyche – is not a new insight. Nor is the consideration of the history of fetishism as theory in the discourse of multiple disciplines new. Others also earlier argued that theorists' use of "fetishism" to denote the irrational thought of "others" actually betrays their own hidden desires. Matory's unique contribution is his mediation between this Western intellectual history and actual African

“fetish” objects, enabling contemporary Afro-Atlantic priests, who make use of “spirited things,” to “talk back.”

Wielding “fetish” as a “word-weapon,” Matory throws down a gauntlet to challenge the West to revisit the canonical theories of Marx and Freud by taking on the real-world referents of the term. Although he admits that he has intentionally “provoked a fight,” the aim of this brilliant sparring partner is not to eviscerate Marx, Freud, the Enlightenment, or “white Christendom” (20). The match he initiates, as a representative of Afro-Atlantic “fetishists,” is engaging rather than condemnatory. Ultimately, he convincingly demonstrates the startling thesis that these fetishized theories and Afro-Atlantic religious paraphernalia “share rhizomatic roots in the Atlantic exchange” (38).

In Parts I and II, Matory re-reads Marx and Freud respectively by situating each in the ethnographic context of early twentieth century Europe, a period of intensive conquest and colonization of Africa during which the term “fetish” widely circulated as a metonym for the supposedly misplaced value of the “savage” or the irrational, magical thinking of the “primitive.” It was also a time of rising anti-Semitism, when Jews were being denigrated as the “negroes of Europe” (19). Marx and Freud, both assimilated, secular Jews, assiduously evaded any association with the realities of actual Africans with whom they ambivalently and “partially identified” (19). Matory argues that both “off white” men deflected the stigma of primitivism, irrationality, psychological immaturity, and lack of agency onto black Africans. This “ethnological Schadenfreude” proclaimed “the inferiority of a third, more vulnerable party” (16) to justify their own inclusion among a white male elite. Thus, their theories hinged on ambivalence towards power: fear of its threat and desire to identify with the oppressors.

Matory argues that Marx and Freud were undoubtedly aware of slavery, US lynchings, and Europe’s dependence on the brutal subjugation and exploitation of colonized Africans, yet their theories were erected on the displacement of these cruel facts. Marx condemned not slavery but the “slave-wages” of workers. Freud granted that the “savage” is actually an interior force, in the form of the id, but conceived of the Greco-Roman world as the apex of civilization that keeps it under control. His antiquities collection studiously avoided African artifacts, despite the fashionable “European Afrophilia” of his day (150), instead making those “fetish” objects represent forbidden libidinous desires. Thus, both theorists used Africans as a “pedestal” on which they erected their theories, while suppressing the true source of their insights.

Even as historical materialism and psychoanalysis were shaped by their theorists’ struggles to safeguard their privileges as full citizens, their twinned fears and aspirations were materially manifest in “fetishes” of their own. For Marx, it was his (pawned) coat; his piano; and the factory. These instantiated his poverty; his bourgeois ambitions for his family; and the place of the workers’ exploitation that nevertheless supported him. For Freud, the rug-draped couch, intimate and exotic, embodied his secret homosexuality; his collection of

Greco-Roman antiquities, his simultaneous desire for belonging and domination over an oppressive Christendom; and his ubiquitous cigar, the phallic dominance of men.

Part III initiates the deeper “talk back” to the West by presenting Afro-Atlantic practitioners’ own conceptions about “whether and how the gods are human-made,” even as it copiously illustrates the lavish materiality of these religious traditions (280). Matory’s primary aim is to demonstrate that practitioners are neither naïve about agency nor duped about the value of the “trinkets” they integrate into the visual iconography of sacred assemblages. Rather the work of the fetish is to transform the meaning and therefore the value of things and, through their ritual engagement, elicit empowerment for practitioners.

Matory introduces the book with the famous Yoruba tale about Eshu, the trickster divinity, whose two-sided hat provokes a dispute over its color between friends. It reveals Eshu as the instigator of creative chaos, who opens the way for new possibility. Likewise, Matory foment trouble with a constructive intent. He also positions himself, like Eshu, at the crossroads between two worlds: as an academic who earns a livelihood through Afro-Atlantic realities, and as a long-time participant-observer with a deep reservoir of experience and intimate relationships with practitioners on both sides of the Atlantic. He playfully invites the reader “to assess the effects of my own ambiguous positionality” on this work (22). As a mediator able to “recognize the value codes and speak the languages of both parties” (310), Matory amassed a considerable collection of Afro-Atlantic religious artifacts, enhanced by gifts bestowed by priests and practitioners whom he befriended over thirty-six years. The book draws its many photographs from the collection, featured on Duke University’s website, “The Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic” (SABA). Like Afro-Atlantic altars, collections are creative assemblages. These self-consciously selected items together generate a comprehensive portrait of the traditions, their history, practices, and aesthetic sensibility. Ironically, the SABA artifacts are flattened as two-dimensional photos, and float in empty space that cannot do justice to the animated traditions or spirited objects. Matory’s extensive treatment reanimates them, illuminating how multi-layered constitutive elements embody the history of global exchanges.

Part III undertakes an exhaustive review of vessels, packets, beads, drums, flags, staffs, and statues from the religions of West African Yoruba and Fon, Central African Kongo and Yaka, Brazilian Candomblé, Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha, Caribbean Spiritism, and Haitian Vodou/Sévi Lwa. Matory delves deeply into the objects’ rich cultural history and ritual significance in order to “address readers at their own most likely point of entry” (178). He underscores that the highly cathected objects of Afro-Atlantic religions are not irrationally invested with agency, but rather constructed according to a set of symbolic rules and aesthetic logic. He allows us to see what these “spirited things” are intended to convey while offering a “real-time, real-world corrective” to Western theories of the fetish (182). Matory also takes pains to include the biographies and voices of

priests and artisans from the Nigerian Yoruba tradition and four Afro-Atlantic religions. He documents their conceptions even when they do not conform to his own: "Though both Babà Murah and Manmi Maude deny my inference that the gods are made and affirm that the gods are self-existent, their spontaneous discourse and stories ... upset any notion that this self-existence resembles the unchanging [God of the Abrahamic faiths]" (280). Through such dialogue, it becomes clear that there is no orthodox interpretation of the nature of the gods or their iconography but that exchanges "between cultures, worlds, or value codes" about them is ongoing (187).

"Talk back" from the Afro-Atlantic perspective illuminates critical and fascinating differences with respect to power, race, and the history of slavery. While historical materialism and psychoanalysis suppress their thematic dependence on slavery, and Marx and Freud struggled with their ambivalent relationship to it, the Afro-Atlantic religions overtly acknowledge that history. The traditions' ritual paraphernalia reflect and reproduce emblems of rank, royalty, and servitude. Yoruba-based religions dramatize the hierarchical relations that characterized the Yoruba Oyo Empire from which huge slave populations were forcibly extracted. Regal mantles, flywhisks, objects bound with rope and pierced with nails to force an embodied spirit to do the master's bidding, all embody the "legacy of semantic and moral conflict" (xvi) of slavery, the crucible on which the Afro-Atlantic traditions were forged. The "houses" into which one is initiated are hierarchies that demand obedient subservience. Power is earned, mastered, and wielded as an essential feature of social order and religious expression. Although it may seem ironic that acolytes "seek solace in religions modeled on royalism, feudalism, slavery, marriage... [dramatized with] supercathected crowns, scepters, croziers, whips, and chains" (94), the reader comes to understand that the genius of these traditions is their capacity to harness spiritual power through these material emblems in order to mobilize "empowering inner agen[cy]" (310). Nevertheless, Matory candidly confesses that the reason he was "not fully initiated" into any of the Afro-Atlantic religions is his "lifelong discomfort with the hierarchy that is central to them" (14).

Matory makes his intimate presence felt throughout. Ever trickster-like, he interjects himself in various guises – American professor, son of a psychologist, collector, partially-initiated practitioner, and most importantly, a black man. Most striking is his regular use of the first-person plural, for example, speaking of "our" gods when he refers to those belonging to African traditions. In this way, he stakes out a privileged vantage point for what Achille Mbembe calls "the Black." Sometimes ludic and sometimes aggressive, it is always effective. It disrupts the normative, supposedly objective and disinterested authorial voice speaking from the white, male, Eurocentric point of view and frees readers from their conditioned submission to that domination. If it throws readers off balance, it achieves the intended re-balancing of "lopsided" theory, forcing them to contend with the subjugated African and Afro-Atlantic perspectives. Matory's approach mirrors

one of his driving insights: that the theories of historical materialism and psychoanalysis operate on the thinker in the same way that a fetish object “works” for a religious practitioner, through ambivalence. They are threatening but they also bring the acolyte liberating insight.

One keen disappointment is the noted omission of Matory’s planned final section of the book: a study of sexual fetishism, the preoccupation with objects cathected with erotic desire. Matory merely foreshadows his disturbingly convincing argument that the increasingly visible sub-culture of sexual “fetish” among mostly middle-class white Americans recapitulates “the actual racial structure of sexual oppression and degradation” of slavery (xv). The BDSM subculture literally fashions itself with the paraphernalia of bondage and discipline: whips, leashes, studded collars, hooks, padlocks, and menacing black apparel that allow the white bourgeoisie to explore otherwise taboo desires. Matory argues that the kink world “studiously avoids” acknowledging the obvious likeness of its transgressive dynamics to the “eponym of master-slave relationships in the United States” (xv). Given the length of this tome, the editors convinced Matory to treat the theme in a separate, forthcoming volume. I contend that had the exhaustive iterations of earlier sections been edited to allow for its inclusion, it would have strengthened the book, bringing his most provocative insights about race relations and objectification full circle. I eagerly await this promised study. I expect it will astonish and reward readers, as does this remarkable work.

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Hindu Pasts: Women, Religion, History. By Vasudha Dalmia. State University of New York Press, 2017. 390 pages. \$90.00 (hardcover).

Vasudha Dalmia’s most recent book, *Hindu Pasts: Women, Religion, Histories*, is a collection of fourteen previously circulated articles (published between 1989 and 2010) organized into three sections: “Colonial Knowledge-Formation,” “Vaishnava Renewals c. 1600–1900,” and “The Hindi Novel: Nineteenth-Century Beginnings.” The articles are preceded by a robust introduction, “Where These Essays are Coming From,” in which Dalmia reflects on her personal and intellectual journeys through various sites in Germany, the United States, and India, including the north Indian city of Banaras. Banaras looms large in her scholarly oeuvre, which has largely focused on the relationships between colonialism, nationalism, Hindi literary production, and new formations in religious (namely Hindu) thought during the modern period. Banaras is also significant to the author’s own personal reflections as a place she sometimes “dreaded” returning