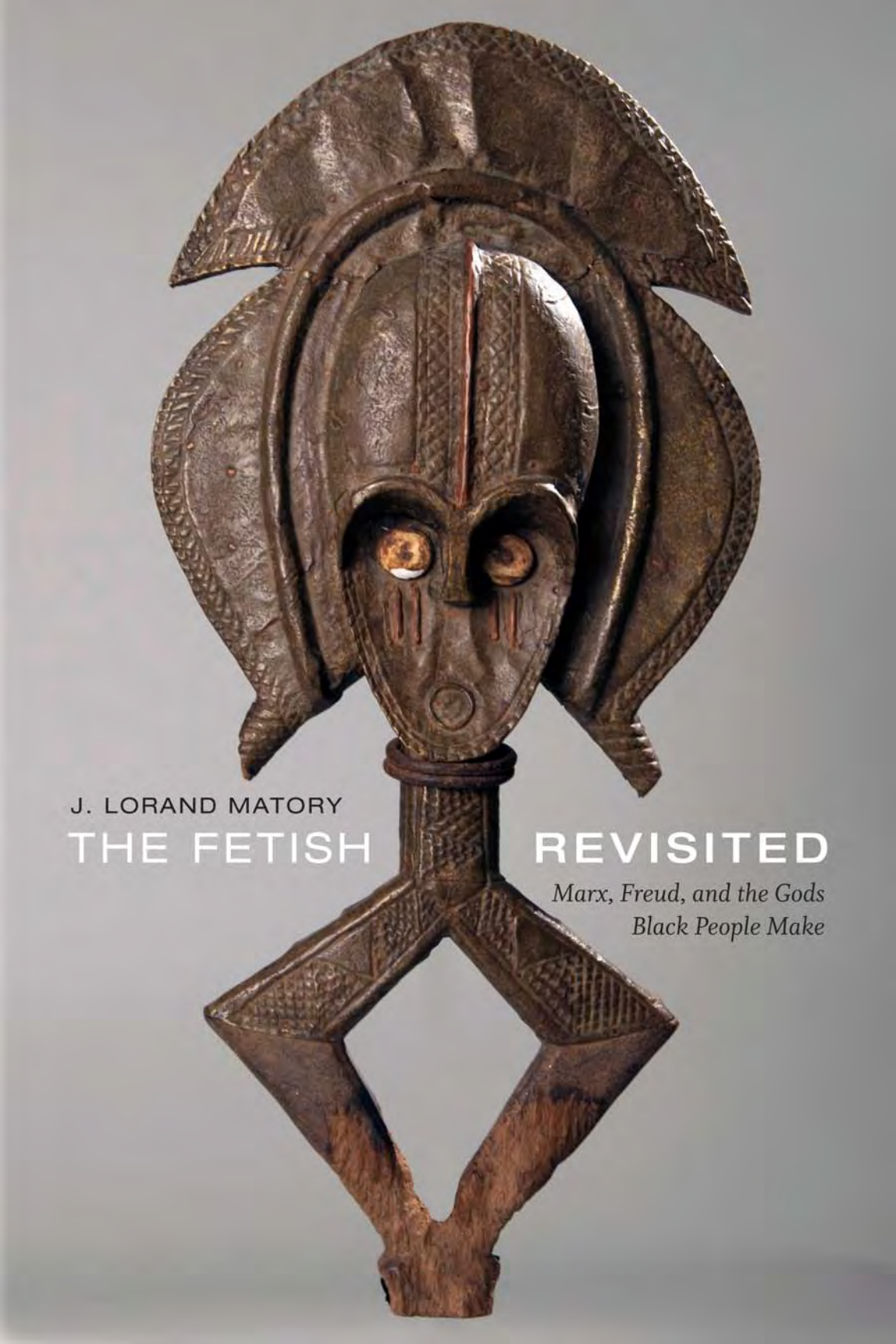

J. LORAND MATORY

THE FETISH REVISITED

Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make

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REVISITED

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Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make

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A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

Throughout this text, I write the names of Nigerian Yorùbá gods in Yorùbá orthography, of Santería/Regla de Ocha gods in Spanish orthography, of Candomblé gods in Portuguese orthography, and of Haitian gods in Kweyòl orthography. While it is the premise of most worshippers that the Nigerian Yorùbá god of thunder and lightning, Ṣàngó, the Cuban god Changó, and the Brazilian god Xangô are the same being in different places, these cognate names are pronounced somewhat differently, and each national population tends to attribute different characteristics, emblematic numbers and colors, and social relationships to the worshipped entity. For example, Brazilian worshippers tend to regard Xangô as a pleasure-loving "mulatto" (*mulato*). And, as one archetype of masculinity, he is contrasted with the dark-skinned (*negro*), humorless, and hard-working Ogum. No such understanding of racial diversity and personal character shapes Nigerian and Beninese Yorùbá worshippers' understanding of Ṣàngó and Ògún.

Of course, a long-running dialogue (Matory 2005) among priests and scholars of diverse nationalities has created new variations within and overlaps among these national orthographies. For example, in the literature on Santería/Ocha, the name of the goddess of prosperity is equally likely to appear as "Ayé" (hybrid Spanish-Yorùbá orthography) and "Allé" (Spanish orthography). And, in recent times, the name of the Cuban spirit of the drums (Añá) has been Nigerianized as "Àyàn" (in unwitting contrast to the more modern Nigerian Yorùbá form, "Àyọ̀n"). In recognition of the fact that the mythologies and ritual standards of these four related religions have diverged considerably and have yet to reconverge fully, I tend to favor the more locale-specific orthography. Two exceptions are "Abakuá" for the Cuban men's mutual aid society and "elekes" for the sacred bead necklaces of Cuban Santería/Ocha, as I do not recall ever having seen these words spelled without the k.

However, in quotes from written texts, I defer to the orthographic choice of the quoted author. When referring to the conceptual unit defined by the unity of a West African god, a Brazilian god, a Cuban god, and a Haitian god as cognates of the same antecedent being, I employ the English-language orthography. For example, I use the term "orishas" for the conceptual unit that

unites the Cuban *orichas*, the Brazilian *orixás*, the West African Yorùbá *òrìṣà*, and the African American "orishas."

As in my last book, *Stigma and Culture: Last-Place Anxiety in Black America* (2015b), I use the lowercase term "black" to describe the phenotype of people whom third parties or I regard as visually similar to most sub-Saharan Africans. By contrast, I use the capitalized term "Black" as an ethnic self-identity, which may include some very light-skinned people who believe that their primary social identity is defined by the African part of their ancestry or the Africanness of their primary religious commitments. Hence, the Black people referred to in my title and the Black Atlantic generally include millions of nonblack people.

Finally, the alphanumeric code in parentheses beside the figure and plate numbers is the catalog number of the illustrated item on the Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic website at Duke University (henceforth SABA), where virtually all of the images can be seen in color. Occasionally, I refer to an item for comparative purposes without including the photo in the text. In either case, you can use that code to search for that item on the website, where you typically can see several photos of and further details about each of these spirited things.

PREFACE

In May 2015, a group of scholars at the Ohio State University interested in Marx, Freud, and race invited me to speak about an earlier draft of this book. Like me, most of them were from humanities or social science disciplines where the citation of Marx and Freud signals healthy skepticism about social inequality and conservative values. So I expected some ambivalence—and indeed felt it myself—over my argument that these heroes of social theory had made some very unprogressive rhetorical uses of Black gods and Black people. The discourse of the "fetish" lassoes us into the role of a progressive Europe's regressive Other, a role into which gentiles had lassoed Jews, as well. And it is perhaps for that reason that Marx and Freud themselves appear ambivalent. I visit the long-running Western conversation about the "fetish" from as far away from the university as I initially could have imagined—not from as close as the very long tradition of Jewish and Black criticism of the West as a whole, not from as nearby as the long but somewhat more specialized tradition of critical Black Marxism, and not even from the edge of the academic galaxy, where the occasional Black scholar takes the time to criticize psychoanalysis (e.g., Tate 1998)—but perhaps from as close to the very source of the term as I could get. I revisit the "fetishes" of Marx and Freud because for nearly four decades, more than two-thirds of my earthly life, African gods have danced in my head, not only shaping my every thought but also both internationalizing and transmogrifying my network of family and friends. Indeed, from their pots, packets, packed statuettes, and staffs, they have watched me writing large parts of this book and have regularly caused me to cast my eye one way rather than another. This book endeavors to articulate the overlooked lessons of these gods—the original, maligned referents of the term "fetish"—for European social theory.

But a number of unexpected and very material lessons still awaited me just off campus. There is hardly a day that I do not think about what Queen Aletheia taught me in the hours before my OSU seminar. Here in the midwestern heartland, I was confronted anew by the central role of highly charged material things in religion, economics, governance, and intimate relationships—not the least of these being the erotic relationships of some average white Americans. This epiphany may strike some readers as politically incorrect, as

many epiphanies are. It seems to resurrect the long history whereby Europeans and Euro-Americans have at times reduced Black people to our sexuality and regarded their engagements with us as a proverbial "walk on the wild side." However, what I have discovered so far in this world is not vulgar racism but a coincidence of deep spirituality and an almost predictable denial of the central Afro-Atlantic references of these identity-defining relationships, or, rather, the seemingly unconscious embedding of those references in emotionally super-charged black things.

A few hours before the talk, my wife, Bunmi, and I took a walk down the main commercial strip neighboring the campus—past a series of pizza and burger joints, bars, a Doc Martens shoe store, a Starbucks coffee shop, a Barnes and Noble bookstore, an Urban Outfitters clothing store, and other commercial establishments typical of US American college towns. Somewhere between what one white male undergraduate called the "sketchy" (read "poor and Black") part of North High Street and the new Short North Arts District, we came to a crossroads where the academic and the religious "problem of the fetish" intersected extravagantly—as if at the volcanic tip of three fiery subterranean streams—with the hidden sexual and racial desires of middle America. The Chamber, according to its business card, is "Ohio's Largest Fetish Store."

Behind its blackened windows were several rooms of glass cases, shelves, and racks of black leather clothing, masks, whips, leashes, collars, and studded bracelets; metal vaginal or anal hooks for use in leading the hooked person around or to tie them up and suspend them from the ceiling; plastic wands intended to cause painful and highly visible welts; electrical appliances for pleasure and pain; lubricants; suction devices intended to heighten nipple sensitivity, even to the point of pain; schoolgirl dresses; and padlocked male chastity devices (this is the item that most caught Bunmi's attention). These, I would discover, are the props of the "Scene"—that is, a range of settings where largely white-collar white Americans gather for serious and often explicitly spiritual play. Middle-class white American bondage, discipline, and sadomasochism (BDSM) and Master/slave (M/s) erotic relationships overlap in their logic, practice, and personnel with similar phenomena in the Netherlands, Germany, and the UK. In their simultaneous function to induce pleasure and pain, they well illustrate Freud's lessons about the ambivalent nature of the fetish and darkly illuminate the role of material things in the continual renegotiation of human social relationships.

The white shopkeeper—Queen Aletheia—was friendly, but she insisted that we leave our bags at the door, underlining the high price and the forbidden desirability of her wares. When I asked Queen Aletheia what a "fetish" is, the centrality of the *material things* she sold was too obvious for her to

mention. She simply defined a fetish as "an obsession" and "anything that makes you happy." However, in her spontaneous narration and description of her wares, she emphasized the pairing of master and slave and the infliction of pain as sources of unparalleled ecstasy—particularly for the slave. Partly because of this vocabulary, it is difficult for me to understand the semiotics of this thing-mediated play outside the context of Europe and sub-Saharan Africa's mutual transformation over the past half millennium.

Indeed, a derogatory word for African hair is an alternative term for fetish play—"kink." Queen Aletheia distinguished kink from the world of "leather," which is specifically gay, but skin-tight black leather and latex are no less central to kink. The attire of both worlds is almost entirely black, and the ordinary forms of sexuality with which kink and leather contrast are called "vanilla," a common reference to the blandness of white middle-class life. Combined with the centrality of master-slave role play, this color coding and the common use of whips to inflict pain invite interpretation as a subliminal reenactment of circum-Atlantic racial history. The similarity of this phenomenon to blackface minstrelsy struck me immediately but, I later discovered, is overlooked in most, if not all, existing studies of BDSM (in discussing the racial dimensions of BDSM at all, Noyes [1997] is a rare exception). As in the blackface minstrelsy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so it is in present-day BDSM that white people blacken themselves in order to express their deepest emotions about their intimate relationships. As in white American youth's consumption of Black music, there is in these other dramas a measure of ridicule and a good measure of identification with the Black and subordinated person. The irony is that the Enlightenment and subsequent generations of bourgeois democracy and socialism have employed their own images of the Black person and the slave as the defining opposites, or antitypes, of what the white citizen should be. Whereas the Enlightenment demonstrated the white bourgeoisie's worthiness of freedom by contrasting that class with slaves and Africans in general, Marx vocalized the same hope for the white working class by contrasting them with the "negro slave." Perversely, by this standard, BDSM sees in the slave a nocturnal antidote to bourgeois white people's exhausting diurnal pretense of self-sufficiency, all-competency, and good conscience.

Queen Aletheia observed that people who, in daily life, are normally in charge—such as judges, lawyers, and doctors—usually prefer to be slaves, also known as "subs" or "bottoms," during their fetish play. Conversely, Queen Aletheia thinks of herself as fully able to lead and take charge in daily life, but she has not had the opportunity to show her ability there. In her professional life and her quotidian social interactions, she is too eager to please. Consequently, in her fetish play she is always a master. She even showed us a

picture of one of her slaves, a white Dutchman whom she met online but has never met in person. In his photo, he wore a collar and carried a sign saying, "It's nice to be a slave." "His thing is blackmail," explained Queen Aletheia, using a term I have always construed as an instance of linguistic racism and, more to the point, semantically connected to the web of color-coded honor and dishonor among the feudal societies of Europe, the plantations of Europe's diaspora, and the equally slaveholding societies of the Middle East.

Yet, in many of the twenty-first-century "dungeons" where BDSM is performed, there seems to be something unexciting, odd, or even abhorrent about conspicuous Black subordination to whites. For example, in a BDSM slave auction observed by Margot Weiss, most of the people sold were apparently white, and the highest bid went for "one well-known heterosexual white top from the South Bay [who] was being sold as a bottom for 'one night only'!" (2011: 3). "About an hour later," Weiss adds,

> a young African American woman with a round face and closely cropped hair was led up to the stage by a tall, severe-looking white man who held the leash attached to her collar. She was the only person to appear on the stage with someone else, so the man explained that he needed to tell us, the audience, a few things about his slave. As she stood there, back straight, staring straight ahead, her master, addressing us in a tight, steely voice, said that she was fit. As he spoke, he yanked up her dress to display her shaved genitals, and he then turned her around. Still holding her dress above her waist, he smacked her ass so hard she pitched forward; the leash attached to the collar around her neck stopped her fall. Turning her back around, he said she is very submissive and guaranteed to make us happy. . . . The audience was quiet throughout this display. When the bidding started, it was reserved; she did not sell for a lot of money. (Weiss 2011: 3–4)

In sum, the audience was the most excited about the submission of a "well-known heterosexual white" man and the least excited—and perhaps the most repulsed—by the submission of a black female. The novelty of bottoming by this *particular* straight white man may account for some or all of the high bid. But the patent disinterest in a Black woman's enslavement is consistent with Queen Aletheia's and others' reports to me in Ohio, West Virginia, and Durham, North Carolina (see also Brame, Brame, and Jacobs 1993). While much of the concern about BDSM among white feminists during the 1970s concerned female submissives', or slaves', ostensible betrayal of feminism, my preliminary, twenty-first-century research suggests that for many white American participants in BDSM, the greatest thrill derives not

from the recapitulation but from the dramatic *inversion* of and relief from normative race, gender, and class hierarchies.

Noyes (1997: 4–5, 109–10) cites late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German studies of sadomasochism regarding the range of the hierarchical social arrangements rehearsed and parodied in sadomasochistic role play and cites Fanon's ([1952] 2008) explanation of the frequency with which white men adopted the subordinate role in their sadomasochistic fantasies about and relationships with Black men during the era of European overseas imperialism. Fanon observed that, in the context of European overseas imperialism, race thinking denies half of the humanity of white people, projecting it onto Black people, and denies half of the humanity of Black people, projecting it onto white people. This process creates in each racialized party a longing to recover the repressed half of its humanity. Noyes's further, and more emphatic hypothesis, is that white male masochism accelerated at the height of imperialism as an expression of liberal guilt and in a reaction to the impending fear that the oppressed would turn the tables on their oppressors. Indeed, during the same epoch, Freud was anticipating a "race war."

In this world organized around the defiance of conventional taboos, sadistic scenes that too closely recapitulate the actual racial structure of sexual oppression and degradation at the foundation of the Atlantic political economy are the greatest taboo.[1] US American practitioners of kinky play and of the related practice of 24/7 Master/slave or Owner/property relationships often model their relationships explicitly on historical scenarios—including Greco-Roman and Hebrew slavery, medieval fealty, Victorian and Edwardian servitude (after the fashion of the British television drama *Upstairs, Downstairs*), Guru/chela, and military hierarchies—but studiously avoid and expressly deny the likeness of their relationships to the most immediate eponym of master-slave relationships in the United States (for a rich range of insider accounts of erotic M/s relationships, see Kaldera 2014). There may be multiple reasons for this denial. Perhaps one is that the greatest thrills in these sexual traditions come from transgression, and the confession that one is recapitulating a relatively recent and nearby social convention is a turn-off. However, particularly in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, white Master/Black slave relationships are indeed highly transgressive. It may also be the case that consistent revulsion, aversion, denial, inversion, and guilt expressed in regard to white male Master/Black female slave relationships flow from the repression of a socially unacceptable but widespread and powerful desire that, if indulged, might unleash latent or closeted racism and detonate all of the protections of human equality before the law that we have built brick-by-brick since Guinea-Coast Africans and western Europeans

started talking in the sixteenth century. Some commentators on this practice explain their discomfort in precisely this way. I will pursue these themes further in my next book.

This book, however, concerns the lopsidedly ambivalent responses of middling populations—not-quite-white Europeans and Black traders in intercultural merchandise—to the Afro-European encounter of the past five-hundred-odd years. The nighttime mimesis of mastery by daytime subordinates may also offer some valuable hints about the cases at hand. The defining quality of a successful BDSM master is not his or her unfettered domination of the slave but his or her subtle and capacious knowledge of the diurnal master and nocturnal slave's psychology, which enables the nocturnal master to push the nocturnal slave to the edge of his or her tolerance for danger, pain, and humiliation and thus to the peak of his or her pleasure.

That the term "fetish" is used to describe these pleasurable but stigmatized activities is no accident. Nor is the fact that race appears to be such a cardinal, albeit subliminal, metaphor in the social roles and paraphernalia that Marx, Freud, and BDSM participants mobilize as they resist the rival role expectations of other parties. Today's concept of the fetish originated on the West African coast, where African and European traders disagreed about the value and agency of people and things. Heirs to this legacy of disagreement, Hegel, Marx, and Freud invoked materially embodied African gods—so-called "fetishes"—as the universal counterexample of proper reasoning, commerce, governance, and sexuality. Other Westerners, such as twenty-first-century practitioners of BDSM—and the selfsame Freud at certain moments—have embraced this term in reimagining and refashioning their intimate relationships. In common, all of these Western actors were engaged in the ritual and symbolic management of the slave within themselves—that is, both the simultaneous threat and promise of dependency on and subordination to people like them. BDSM masters illustrate the anxieties of the social shape-shifter, the parvenu, and the cultural and racial intermediary, as well as the exceptional insights and cruelty that their ambiguity and longing for personal dignity can sometimes inspire.

The present volume argues that the priests of Yorùbá and Kongo "traditional" religions, Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha (henceforth Santería/Ocha), Brazilian Candomblé, and Haitian Vodou are not the bearers of some primordial, history-less tradition but heirs to the same sixteenth- and seventeenth-century legacy of semantic and moral conflict on the "Guinea Coast" that inspired the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment discourse of the fetish in Europe. The sequel to this volume—tentatively titled *Zombies and Black Leather*—will focus on the intercultural dialogue between Haiti and the US about hierarchy, animated things, and disanimated people. These

two volumes and the interactive audiovisual materials on the Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic website[2] reveal the history shared by European social theory, white American fetishism, and the Afro-Atlantic religions, as well as the diverse social positionalities that generated these diverse responses.

BDSM dungeons are as far removed from the spirit possession ceremonies of the Guinea Coast and its diaspora as they are from Marx's nineteenth-century efforts to influence the European labor movement and from Freud's fin-de-siècle psychiatric clinic. Yet I argue that each of these phenomena embodies a thing-mediated, problem-solving struggle over who we humans are in our essence and how we are connected to other human beings. These struggles are not only social but also deeply emotional. At issue are the worth of dependency and hierarchy among people and the related question of the relationship between people and things. The foundation of this project is the insight that the so-called fetishes of the Afro-Atlantic religions have counterparts in historical materialism, psychoanalysis, and white American BDSM, that each of these systems invests assertions about proper social order in certain physical props, and that these intellectual and material assertions about social order cannot be understood outside the context of their common roots in a half millennium of Atlantic slavery and colonialism.

Contrary to the pretense of colonial-era social evolutionisms like Marx's and Freud's, Afro-Atlantic priests are their contemporaries, as well as important thinkers, actors, and leaders in the circum-Atlantic world. Like the most influential Afro-Atlantic priests, Marx and Freud were intermediaries between ethnoracial groups and between ranks in a hierarchical circum-Atlantic field. They are coeval and responsive to each other in real historical time, but the practice, the logic, and, concomitantly, the material props of their leadership differ in ways related to their different roles in a circum-Atlantic field of power. Each of the systems they founded endeavors to resolve problems arising from the fact that other thinkers, actors, and leaders have imposed expectations about the distribution of value and agency that disadvantage people like Marx, Freud, and the Afro-Atlantic priests (see also Matory 2005, chapter 1).

Thus, the present volume argues against the assumption embedded in conventional notions of "fetishism" that, in contrast to African gods, European social theory is a disembodied and socially neutral articulation of truths about all times and all places. Rather, it is as historical and as socially positioned and materially embedded as any of the social phenomena to which it is applied. For example, the most influential insights of Marx and Freud were shaped by these men's ambiguous class, gender, and race amid Europe's integration into a global politics increasingly defined by the disadvantages of being black or insufficiently different from black people. So, for example,

Marx's *Capital* represented enslaved Africans not as the most abused of workers or, as in the case of the Haitian Revolution, the vanguard of revolutionary resistance to exploitation but, instead, as mute exemplars of how European wage workers like Marx should *not* be treated. Marx made his point through a reassessment of not only the value of commodities and factories but also, concomitantly, the relative agency of the white wage worker and the "negro slave." That reassessment combined a most radical appeal for the agency and worth of white workers with the most reactionary rhetoric of southern US slaveholders about the incompetency of Black workers. This elevation of the European wage worker at the expense of the "negro slave" follows the logic of what I described in my last book as "ethnological Schadenfreude" (Matory 2015b).

If Marx was motivated by the need to distinguish himself and his fellow European wage workers from Black people, the greatest advantage for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century African merchant-monarchs and priests, whose innovations shaped all of the Yorùbá-Atlantic religions today, lay in establishing their own efficacy as the conduits of foreign resources and mediators of local contact with foreign people. Their technology of integrating foreign personages into their own relational selves was usefully adapted to the needs of manumitted black people and their descendants, who needed to mobilize and manipulate clientelistic relationships in order to thrive under the adversarial and hierarchical conditions of the American republics (see, e.g., Matory 2005). That technology has also been useful to African and diasporic actors anxious to affirm family solidarity and mutual obligation despite international migration and conversion to other religions (Richman 2005). I argue that the commemoration, fortification, and regulation of challenged interclass or long-distance relationships remains a defining feature of ritual, priestly testimony, and the contents of Santería/Ocha, Candomblé, and Vodou altars.

In this dialogical analysis, the post-sixteenth-century ideas embodied in Afro-Atlantic altars are taken to illuminate their European counterparts as much as the reverse. By heuristically describing both European social theories and African altars as "fetishes," *The Fetish Revisited* highlights the fact that each is the articulation and materialization of a contested proposal about how such social relationships should work. Each of these "fetishes" nominates into socially recognized being a typology of actors, their powers and goals, and a set of norms governing those actors' interaction, norms prioritizing the interests of some of those actors over others'. Therefore, European social theories and African altars are to be judged not for their truth or falsehood but for their relative efficacy at rearranging people's social priorities in a context where there is more than one choice regarding how

people should organize themselves and how the rewards of their cooperation should be distributed. So it matters that, whereas Marx failed in his own efforts to organize and elevate the working class through his re-valuation of commodities and factories, the Afro-Atlantic priests who mentor me have successfully organized diverse populations around their own re-valuation of material things. And they have done so in competition with the Abrahamic religions and with the post-Enlightenment ideas—including Marxism—that dominate contemporary nation-states.

Freud knew as well as Marx and the Afro-Atlantic priests that things and the value attributed to them powerfully mediate human relationships. So *The Fetish Revisited* also analyzes the ambivalent social relationships that Freud reorganized through the medium of couches, armchairs, cigars, alcohol, intaglio rings, pilgrimages to the Acropolis and Rome, his antiquities collection, his father's fur hat, and his texts about the "savage." I argue that this reorganization was concerned as much with the enfranchisement of assimilated Jewish men as with curing neurosis.

The Fetish Revisited culminates in a detailed ontological, psychoanalytic, and class analysis of the spirited things that embody social relationships in the Afro-Atlantic religions.[3] Contrary to Marx's demeaning metaphor and his assumption that the so-called fetishist is blind to the source of the fetish's value, Afro-Atlantic priests typically know that it is people who make gods. These religions reconfigure interfamilial, interclass, interethnic, interracial, and intergender relationships through the liturgical assembly, re-valuation, and care of material things, many of which have been imported from Europe or by Europeans—such as Venetian and Bohemian beads, Scottish gin, Dutch schnapps and beer, French perfumes and champagne, Maldivean cowries, mirrors, satin, sequins, and soup tureens. Bohemia, incidentally, is not far from Freud's Moravian birthplace.

The spirited things of Europeans, Africans, and their descendants have not been produced in isolation from each other. They result from an exchange of gazes, ideas, and commodities among three continents. Moreover, they have come to be called "fetishes" precisely because Africans, Europeans, and their descendants have looked at them and intensely disagreed about the value and agency that can legitimately be attributed to them and their makers. And therein, perhaps, lies the intensity of the fetish's affecting power. Hence, this book rests on a heuristic definition of the fetish as a material thing animated by the contrary models of society and the contrary personal expectations of the people who—as Europeans and Africans, buyers and sellers, priests and worshippers, oath-givers and -takers, husbands and wives, masters and slaves, bosses and employers, teachers and students, and so forth—have rival relationships with that material thing. A thing is most likely to be called a

fetish when it mediates the relationship between parties with very different or even opposite perspectives on their social relationship, perspectives that are also expressed in opposite perspectives on the thing itself.

Yet fetishes exercise the greatest and most enduring power over any given person insofar as he or she has internalized and can feel the opposing perspectives that constitute the fetish. Like the fetishes of Freud's patients and the paraphernalia of the gods in most religions, the most powerful spirited things of the Afro-Atlantic religions are deeply ambivalent—embodying simultaneously and sometimes in equal measure both faith and the anticipation of doubt, dissent, and disapproval; the adulation of the master's unbridled power and empathy for the suffering of the enslaved and the subordinated; the hope of protection and the anticipation of punishment for even the pettiest of infractions; the encouragement of pride and the potential for humiliation; the hope of supernumerary rewards and the impending threat of devastating loss. The more polarized the promise and the threat, the more exciting and enduring the fetish.

INTRODUCTION

Èṣù Láàròyé
Exu Larôiê
Èṣù, Lord of the Crossroads, who hears my pleas

Alaroyé Agó
Hearer of My Pleas, open the way

Papa Legba, ouvri bayè pou mwèn
Oh, Mighty Lord of Passages, open the gate for me

I salute the lord of the crossroads and of communication, whose main distinction is that he can turn order into disorder, communication into miscommunication, and vice versa.

Variants of the following story are told in virtually every locale where the gods known as the *òrìṣà*, the *orixás*, the *orichas*, and the orishas are worshipped.

Two dear old friends stood talking in the marketplace when Eshu strolled right between them.

"Did you see how that rude red-hatted man walked right between us?" exclaimed the friend on the right.

"What do you mean?" asked the friend on the left. "His hat was black!"

"Are you blind?" said the first friend, accusingly. "It was red!"

"No! You're crazy! It was black!"

The debate accelerated, and the insults grew less and less forgivable, until the hat-wearing man came back and again strolled between the friends, whereupon they realized that one side of the rude man's hat was red and the other black.

Red and black is the foremost sacred color combination of the god known in Nigeria as Èṣù or Elégbára, in Brazil as Exu or Leba, in Cuba as Elegguá, and in Haiti as Legba, but he can also be invoked by the juxtaposition of the similarly opposite black and white. In English, any of these avatars of the god may all be called "Eshu." He is the lord of the crossroads, communication, confusion, and virility. But he is not everywhere the same. In Cuba he is a

small child, in Haiti a bent but wily old man. In Nigeria he is both. But everywhere his hallmarks are unpredictability, heterogeneity, irony, and contrasts of interpretation (see also Gates 1988).

In the Yorùbá-Atlantic world, *an* Eshu—that is, a human-assembled being made of laterite or cement and imbued by its contents and its ritual treatment with the life force and personality of this god—ideally sits at the entrance of every marketplace, entry gate of a compound, and exterior door of a shop or a residence. In the Yorùbá- and the Fòn-Atlantic traditions, he sports a huge penis or an emblem on his head that may be a hat but is more often a blade or phallic extension (*ọ̀gọ̀*; see figures 1.1 and 1.2). In his most elaborate representations, a curved phallic structure on his head ends in a face looking to the rear. This emblem highlights his power to penetrate boundaries, to see and be seen by opposite worlds.

Eshu is most famously described as a trickster. He is that. However, he is also a Janus, simultaneously discerning the past and the future, the outside and the inside, this world and the Other. He is the male principle of penetration that complements the female principle of containment, which is the heart of the spirit-possession religions discussed in this book. Equally important to the argument of this book is the power that an Eshu—like other so-called fetishes—derives from being seen from contrasting but contemporaneous worlds. This is a defining feature of those materialized gods dubbed "fetishes" by European critics since the sixteenth century and especially since the Enlightenment. They stand at the crossroads of African and European worlds and are, in many ways, among the creations and the creators of those worlds. Through the juxtaposition of mirror-opposite geometrical shapes in opposite colors, the shrine house for Elegguá in plate 2 dramatizes this theme of communication between opposite worlds and opposite perspectives. It is striking, in a manner that will be explored below, that this juxtaposition between opposite colors and shapes is mediated by money—the cowrie-shell money of the Guinea Coast slave trade. Unless Eshu, with his spirit of unpredictability and love of contention, is saluted at the beginning of each meal, visit, ritual, or other project, he is likely to disrupt every human-made plan for that occasion. So I salute him here. Whereas Marx and Freud represent the fetish as a pathology, I argue, with an appeal for Eshu's supportive intercession, that fetishes are fulcrums of all social organization and self making, including historical materialism and psychoanalysis themselves. Like Eshu's hat, fetishes are things that both animate contrary social roles and are animated by contrary value codes. In ritual and social use, they both clarify subjectivities and facilitate their interpenetration.

FIGURE I.1 Shrine sculpture of the Yorùbá god Èṣù, probably from Nigeria. Note the phallic extension from the head, known as the *òǵọ* (SABA COLLECTION D125).

FIGURE I.2 Rear shot of Èṣù's *òǵọ*. Suggesting his ambivalence, the appealing face, with its stately expression, is matched by an animalistic, carnivorous face at the rear. The horse calls attention not only to the god's dignity but also to the god's deft movement between worlds, just as his two faces dramatize his ability to see both of them.

The Gods Dance on Hegel's Doorstep

On a cold and foggy February morning in Berlin, my wife, Bunmi, woke from a dream about scores of silver fish swimming the clear waters of the normally cloudy river that flows through Ìgèdè-Èkìtì, her Nigerian hometown and the origin of the Yorùbá river goddess, Ọ̀ṣun. Just as dreams were for Freud the "royal road to the unconscious," they are, for the priests of many Afro-Atlantic religions, windows on the Other world, which is also the inner world and, often, a revelation of the future. While the Enlightenment strove to establish a clear *distinction* between the subject and the object and between the European self and the African Other, the Afro-Atlantic religions simultaneously strove to clarify the *mutually constituting relationship* between the person and the universe, between the inner world and the outer, and between local populations and distant ones.

An heir to both *òrìṣà* religion and the Southern Baptist mission, Bunmi opened this window to me as we made our way, two days after the dream, to the Ilê Obá Silekê Temple in the Kreuzberg neighborhood of Berlin, a house of worship founded and led by Babá Murah Soares, a Candomblé priest originally from the coastal Brazilian state of Bahia (figure 1.3). Yet, like other Candomblé priests, he identifies Bunmi's West African homeland as the origin of his gods.

Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion of divination, sacrifice, healing, music, dance, and spirit possession. The only rival to its beauty is its complexity. Though this religion is headquartered in the coastal Brazilian state of Bahia, it has counterparts and offshoots all over urban Brazil. This religion also has historically connected counterparts not only in Nigeria and the Republic of Benin but also in Cuba, Trinidad, Haiti, Argentina, and the Cuban diaspora throughout the Americas, where converts of every ethnoracial background have joined in. In Brazil, believers attribute miraculous powers and exemplary flaws to gods known variously as *orixás*, *voduns*, *inquices*, and *caboclos*, depending on the Candomblé denomination.

Babá Murah's temple is consecrated to the *orixás* and the *caboclos*. The adventures, personalities, and kinship relations of these superhuman and transhuman beings are described in an extensive mythology and body of oracular wisdom, which also serves to explain the personalities and to model the options of their human worshippers, as well as the worldly relations among those worshippers and their neighbors. Through blood sacrifice and lavish ceremonies of music, dance, and spirit possession—and occasional visits to the Roman Catholic Church, whose saints are correlated with them—the gods are asked to intervene beneficently in the lives of worshippers and to keep their foes at bay.

FIGURE I.3 Exterior of Ilê Obá Silekê, a temple of the Brazilian Candomblé religion in Berlin.

Orisha-worship first came to Germany in the 1970s with Cuban students and young workers on contract in the socialist and officially atheist Democratic Republic of Germany, then commonly known as East Germany. Since then, mixed marriages, tourism to Cuba, and a growing interest in Cuban music attracted a number of Germans to the Afro-Cuban Santería/Ocha religion (Bahia 2012: 229; also Matory 2015a). Candomblé, its Brazilian counterpart, has attracted Germans through similar mechanisms (Bahia 2013: 9). One of the earliest *orixá* priests in Germany was Mãe Dalva, who arrived in 1979. Born in Bahia, she married in Berlin and worked as a street cleaner and housekeeper until the year the Berlin Wall fell, in 1989. Today, she has many online imitators (Bahia 2013: 8). Yet it was Babá Murah who founded the first Candomblé temple in Germany. The temple was initially operated out of Babá Murah's basement apartment in Berlin's Neukölln neighborhood, but in 2008 he and his German partner, Martin, rented and beautifully renovated their current headquarters, which is consecrated to an avatar (*qualidade*) of the god of thunder and lightning, Xangô. The temple's name, Ilê Obá Silekê, means "House of the King Xangô Aganju," who is identified with the "center of the volcano" and is closely linked to the sea goddess Iemanjá (Bahia 2012: 232–33).

An Enlightenment-influenced researcher and a relationship-influenced devotee of the *òrìṣà*, I immediately identified Bunmi's dream as a message

from Ọ̀ṣun, for whom Bunmi now keeps two altars in our home in Durham, North Carolina—one assembled by Ìyá Ọ̀ṣun Òṣogbo (aka Adedoyin Talabi Faniyi), high priestess of Ọ̀ṣun in the Nigerian town of Òṣogbo, and the other by Doté Amilton Sacramento Costa, a high priest of the Candomblé religion, from the Brazilian state of Bahia.

Both Ìyá Ọ̀ṣun Òṣogbo and Doté Amilton are frequent visitors to our home and have been part of Bunmi's transformation in recent years from a Baptist to a proud advocate of her ancestral Yorùbá religious traditions. As a young person, she would hasten her steps when she had to pass in front of a palace, a site she associated with the possibility of forcible marriage to the monarch, and she heard Christian-inspired tales that the god Ṣàngó, when appearing on earth in the body of his possession priest, could make a barren woman fertile, but her offspring would be born idiots. The world of the Yorùbá gods was, for her, fraught with gendered threats and anxiety, particularly those anxieties related to polygamy and husbands' domination of their wives. In fact, Yorùbá wives tend to earn outside the home and exercise a high degree of self-determination. However, the forms of gender asymmetry that Bunmi witnessed in her own birth home led her to admire the likes of Mary Wollstonecraft. Ultimately, it was my own African American devotion to Africa and the disempowering images of African women that she encountered upon immigrating to the United States that made Bunmi answer the call of the goddess.

Only recently—following that discussion of the manuscript at the Ohio State University—did Bunmi reveal to me that she had been dreaming about the *òrìṣà* gods and their priesthood since she was a small child. In the recesses of sleep, she saw herself painted white with kaolin (*efun*). Such dreams, she offered, seemed to foretell a calling to resume her writing and her activism as a spokesperson of an Africa now maligned not only by Westerners but also by the fast-growing population of Pentecostals in her homeland. In that writing and activism, she now has a circum-Atlantic network of priestly and publishing allies, their devotion shaped both by a collaborative affirmation of orisha values and relationships and by these allies' simultaneous participation in social arrangements grounded in Muslims', Christians', and Western secularists' shared denunciation of those relationships and values.

That day in Berlin was the occasion of Bunmi's first visit to Germany's only Candomblé temple and the day of Babá Murah's annual festival for the sea goddess Iemanjá, a cognate of the Cuban Ocha goddess of the sea, Yemayá, and of the Nigerian Yorùbá river goddess, Yemọja. These goddesses might be regarded as the tutelary spirits of the maritime exchange that gave birth to the Afro-Atlantic world. Even in Nigeria, her river flows straight to the sea rather than meandering; even in the distant hinterland, her altars are rich

in old marine shells, and her most intimate emblems include a mermaid figure resembling its counterparts on the prows of European ships. Indeed, in my scholarly pursuit of what is African within me, it was the mammoth New Year's festivals of Iemanjá on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro that led me ultimately to Yorubaland in search of the goddess's African sources.

Iemanjá, Yemayá, and Yemọja are among the most famous of the score of orishas worshipped around the Atlantic perimeter. Each of these gods personifies a network of natural forces, places, technologies, social conventions, human personality types, animals, herbs, possession priests, and consecrated things. Like many priests, Ìyá Ọ̀ṣun Òṣogbo regards these gods as ancient ancestors, but not necessarily in the sense of biological forebears. She compares the worshipper's relationship with the god to my relationship with James B. Duke, the ostensible founder of a community to which I belong, Duke University. Similarly, when she was alive, the artist and *òrìṣà* priestess Susanne Wenger was no less a reincarnation of the goddess Ọ̀ṣun and no less a mother to the current Ìyá Ọ̀ṣun Òṣogbo for being Austrian-born. Yet the gods are ancestors in a further sense. They are models of human response to the dilemmas we face in any given sociocultural setting. In worshipping them, we contemplate the motives behind and the potential consequences of the good and bad choices that a person of a given archetypal personality or in a given archetypal situation might be tempted to make. Such reflective choices are a transformative and, indeed, creative dimension of ancestor-worship and of orisha-devotion alike. As a function of the social relationships that we create, transform, and are created and transformed by, these gods remain present in altars and in the bodies of living people. Each generation of altars and possession priests extends and transforms a god, just as a child extends and transforms its forebears' and role models' legacies.

The gods also vividly instantiate what is perhaps the most fundamental principle of Yorùbá cosmology—that the world is seldom merely what it seems. Another world lies behind this visible one, constantly influencing and being influenced by it. It is a world of unseen relationships made, unmade, remade, and transformed over time by the efforts of people in this world. We all possess certain powers of discernment that penetrate the veil of appearances. We sometimes come to recognize that the beings around us who appear to be ordinary people are actually animals, spirit malefactors or benefactors, visitors from the Other world, physical embodiments of fate brought from that world, or dead people who have remained too long in this world. We can also discern the signs of guidance sent back from the Other world by our ancestors. Sometimes geographical features, meteorological events, natural disasters, plants, animals, and even stones are the veils behind which the denizens of the Other world—and the signals they send—appear before us. However, with

the benefit of divinatory tools and intuition, priests are experts at detecting the Other-worldly connections that underlie the apparent shape of things.

Much of the ritual in the Afro-Atlantic religions consists of efforts to monitor and regulate the cross-border movements of gods, unborn or deceased human beings, and other spirits who normally dwell in that invisible world that parallels our own. Events in that parallel world affect events in our world, and periodically the denizens of that Other world make dramatic appearances in our world, sometimes on their own mysterious volition and sometimes by the invitation and under the regulation of living human beings, sometimes as ghostly presences and sometimes as flesh-and-blood bodies. Like dreams, the Afro-Atlantic Other world mashes up what Westerners might call the past, the future, inner sentiment, and exogenous forces that affect the conditions of life. Yet what all of these Other-worldly apparitions have in common is that they remind us about interrupted, forgotten, or neglected relationships and that they demand a collective response—typically the hierarchical invocation of protection and guidance by a god, through a priest, and of a supplicant.

Moreover, it is not only a phenomenological reality but also a truism embedded in much Yorùbá-Atlantic parlance that the gods are made by people. The Other world is within us and among us, not only irrelevant to human life until we engage it through ritual but also dependent on our ritual action for its realization. It is in this way that Iemanjá came to Kreuzberg.

The occasion of Bunmi's and my visit on February 8, 2014, was the annual festival of this goddess of the sea. Along with similar Yorùbá-, Fòn-, and Kongo-Atlantic divinities in Trinidad, Haiti, Cuba, Brazil, Nigeria, Benin, and the US, Yemọja/Iemanjá/Yemayá and Oshun/Ọ̀ṣun/Oxum/Ochún preside over a circum-Atlantic religion that has now taken root in the European Union, more in Portugal and Spain than elsewhere, but at the center of old Protestant Prussia, as well. Nowadays the Candomblé religion creates, monitors, and regulates relationships not only between this world and the Other but also between central Europe and the great powers of the Black Atlantic.

We arrived at the Iemanjá festival late, but just in time to witness Babá Murah demonstratively expelling a group of German supplicants who had shown up in khaki, despite the long-standing and internet-publicized requirement that everyone in attendance wear only white. Babá Murah says that if he were not so strict, everyone would show up in black, which he describes as "Berlin's national color" and as a taboo in the Bahian homeland of his religion. Because other commonsense forms of devotion, rapport, and redistributive ethics from Brazil are not common sense in Germany, Babá Murah also instructs visitors to bring flowers or candles to the festival, to pay for the coffee they drink, and to contribute money for the sacred meal that

follows the festival. However, he says that what Germans find most difficult to get used to is Candomblé's hierarchy. For example, one Enlightenment-inspired German journalist reportedly penned a complaint about the absurdity of a man sitting there in his chair—that is, Babá Murah—while others bow down before him and put their heads on the ground. But Babá Murah explains, "they are not bowing down for me, Samuel [his secular name]; they're bowing down for the *pai-de-santo* [the father-in-saint]"—then correcting himself—"for the *babalorixá* [the priest]."

Being Black and Brazilian, Babá Murah insists, he will never be German. However, he admits that on his not-infrequent trips to Brazil, his countrymen note that his Portuguese has a German accent. Moreover, he is now so Germanized that he delivers instructional lectures about his religion during festivals, and he answers direct questions about practice and belief (mostly without sarcasm). In Bahian Candomblé, people normally learn through discreet observation and performance, not explanation. Like all Afro-Atlantic priests Babá Murah is an exemplary mediator between worlds.

Fortunately, Bunmi and I, though imperfectly dressed, were spared the humiliating lecture. We were among the small handful of black or *mulato* people in the crowd of 80–100 people in the room, and besides Babá Murah we were the only people who could have passed for sub-Saharan; everyone else was caramel or wintry pale. Similarly, under such circumstances in Brazil, Bunmi and I have always been treated as special. Indeed, one early morning on a São Paulo street corner, a man spontaneously knelt and performed a salaam at Bunmi's feet. He certainly saw Bunmi's coffee complexion and radiantly white Nigerian attire, but he may have discerned in her some invisible power, as well. That day at the Berlin temple, the doorman simply handed Bunmi some white work pants to cover her blue jeans and signaled for me to remove my black socks, whereupon the three Brazilian drummers resumed their performance and the singer resumed his alternation between time-honored songs—some recognizable and others unrecognizable to a modern Yorùbá speaker—and prayers in the perfectly recognizable modern Yorùbá that one of the drummers had studied academically.

Before long, the gods began to appear alongside us. One minute, a thirty-ish white alternative healthcare practitioner (*Heilpraktiker*) from the German city of Duisberg was chatting with me amiably and expressing surprise at the connection between Candomblé and a West African people called the "Yorùbá." The next minute, his eyes shuttered, his body rocked gently, and his breath became a gentle snore. Like me, he was still standing up, but a god had quietly taken his head.

The first goddess to take the dance floor was the Cuban goddess who rules bodies of fresh water. Ochún mounted the body of Joaquín la Habana, a

graham-colored male priest of Cuban Santería/Ocha, friend of the house, and commander of his own domestic temple (*casa-templo*) elsewhere in Berlin. This goddess's dramatic movement and laughter distinguish her from most apparitions of her Brazilian counterpart, the freshwater goddess Oxum (see, for example, SABA Collection C073). However, both Ochún and Oxum are associated with the wealth of gold, the coolness of fresh water and fans, the vanity of women's gazing in the mirror, the number five, and fish in abundance. Both share a great kinship and much iconography with the Nigerian goddess Ọ̀ṣun, who is identified with a specific river, favors brass rather than gold, and does not openly laugh like Ochún. That Saturday night, after descending into the body of her Cuban son, Ochún not only laughed but also twirled, sparkled, and undulated like water, like a coquette, like joy itself. She clearly enjoyed herself.

On the way to the festival, for which our 5:15 P.M. arrival was very late, Bunmi had repeatedly reminded me—no, commanded—that we were going to leave the festival in time for a 6 P.M. Black History Month lecture at the *Werkstatt der Kulturen* (the "Atelier of Cultures"), a state-subsidized multicultural center in the same fashionable Kreuzberg neighborhood. The name of the center derives from a non-Hegelian and anti-Enlightenment strand of German thought—that is, the "Romanticism" of Johann Gottfried von Herder, Gustav Klemm, and Franz Boas—that, originally in the defense of German "cultural"/"spiritual" equality with the dominant French, posited the moral equality of all peoples' collective lifeways, or "cultures" (*Geister/Kulturen*), including non-European ones. Even beyond the German-speaking lands, the tension between German Romanticism and the Enlightenment remains a lived reality at the heart of "fetish" talk.

Bunmi's previously insistent demands were soon forgotten as the river goddess Ochún ceded the floor to Babá Murah's Iansã (warrior goddess of wind and storm, and the Brazilian counterpart to the Nigerian Ọya, goddess of River Niger) and a young white German's Iemanjá twirled amid diaphanous waves of blue and white cloth. Though lacking the grace of the Ochún, the Iemanjá called to mind Marlene Dietrich's character in "The Blue Angel," a Weimar cabaret siren who lured the *spiessig* (or "square") schoolteacher Immanuel Rath to his moral and social downfall. Without knowing much about the young man whom Iemanjá had possessed, I intuited that his love of the goddess was well reciprocated and that his trance was not a downfall but an embrace and celebration of the young German's and of Germany's collectively heterogeneous self. Africa's siren call to Germany had also produced the celebrated work of Leo Frobenius and Felix von Luschan, founding fathers of African art history. The same country produced the founder of cultural anthropology, Franz Boas, the liberalism of the Weimar Republic,

and, partly under the tutelage of the United States, the most vicious forms of Enlightenment-influenced scientific and legal racism. Yet from an Afro-Atlantic perspective, opposite reactions to the same object and the presence of multiple personalities in the same individual or nation are no surprise.

Spirit possession is the most dramatic public demonstration of the vessel-based Yorùbá-Atlantic model of the person. It is a public and visible transaction between opposite beings and between this and the Other world. In these moments, as when Ochún, Iansã, and Iemanjá came to Babá Murah's sacred party in Kreuzberg, everyone sees that these created gods are real, literally alive and powerful—indeed, powerful enough to make you abandon your previous plans. Yet, contrary to the tragicomic moral of *The Blue Angel*, that the encounter with the opposite world yields contradiction and destruction, Yorùbá-Atlantic priests see in opposite beings the opportunity for a constructive and reciprocal relationship. Indeed, the copresence of such beings within the self is normal.

These are not the only Afro-Atlantic gods I have met face to face. There are also the Fòn-Atlantic snake god, Damballah, the goddess of motherhood, Èzili Dantò, and the Gede, the playful spirits of death, whom I meet at similar festivals hosted by friends in Haiti and the United States (Matory in preparation). But I am also friends with Siete Rayo, the Cuban-Kongo spirit of thunder and lightning. I do not normally like cigars, but I have enjoyed smoking them with the Cuban slave spirits called *congos* and *muertos*, or "dead people," and I have partied with dead Brazilian Indians and Gypsies, too. In the Afro-Latin American religions, when the dead possess people, they not only give comfort and good advice but also sing, dance, drink, joke, and tell good stories, easing many a stressful life condition. Dead people can be fun. For his part, Pena Grande ("Big Feather"), the *caboclo* Indian spirit of my best friend in Brazil, has vowed that he will come whenever I call for help.

Babá Murah's temple sits in a carriage house at the back of a courtyard, known as a *Hinterhof*, surrounded by apartment buildings. It is soundproofed to prevent his German neighbors' complaints about the drumming. At the front of the court stands one tall building whose basement houses a dozen of Babá Murah's Exus, guardians of the front door and the passageway into the courtyard. One Exu—the slave of Babá Murah's Omolu, the lord of pestilence—stands beside and guards the door of the carriage house itself. These anthropomorphic beings are made of cement, with cowrie-shell eyes and mouths.

Like other Yorùbá-Atlantic gods, these are instances of a generic god called by a proper noun. Generically, Exu is the lord of doorways and crossroads, of sexuality and particularly virility, and of communication. Once placated, he keeps the house, the event, or the mission free from the disorder, the heat, and the inappropriate sexuality of the street (see plate 1). Uniquely in Brazil,

he also has female avatars, known variously as Exuas, Pombagiras, and Maria Padilhas. Each altar embodying this being is also described as *an* Exu, as is the aspect of that generic god that manifests itself in particular priests and temples. And, according to common parlance, each of these instances of the god is "made" by the priest.

All around the *Hinterhof* courtyard are planters for the sacred herbs on which the practice of Candomblé, like other Afro-Atlantic religions, depends for healing and for the making of each materialized instance of the god, in an altar or in a priest. A floor above the festival space is Babá Murah's consultation room, where—on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays—he sits before a circle of beads and a glass of water and casts sixteen cowrie shells in order to divine the problems of people seeking his help. He then prescribes solutions through herbs and the invocation of the *orixás*.

The walls around Babá Murah's consultation room feature curtained storage for the imported powders, seeds, and vessels used in his sacred craft, as well as a half-dozen visible statues of Roman Catholic saints and other Caucasian-looking figures that, following Afro–Latin America's most famous form of "syncretism," represent and once camouflaged these African gods. Babá Murah's grandmother, he says, was baptized Catholic upon her arrival from Africa, so she passed these traditions down to her children and grandchildren, but she gave them the choice to be baptized or not. Unlike many Brazilian Candomblé, Cuban Ocha, and Haitian Vodou priests, Babá Murah declares forcefully that he is not Catholic but purely of the Candomblé religion. Cocoa-brown himself, Babá Murah says that these Caucasian-looking statues have nothing to do with the *orixás*, who are all Nigerian or Beninese and therefore black.

To him, the Roman Catholic statues are merely lifeless and inert leftovers from the superseded past, when his forebears saw some connection between the Catholic saints and the Afro-Brazilian gods. Like the black Saint Benedict above the stove in the kitchen, with his vase of parsley, his candle, and his cup of coffee, these white saints merely commemorate and give a visible presence to the love of the dead black relative who once owned them. Babá Murah says that they also offer white Germans an easier way to identify with the gods. The color of the priests and the worshippers, he hastens to add, does not matter in the least. In addition, two statues of the Hindu gods Shiva and Parvati also adorn the walls of Babá Murah's consultation room. But he said these were just gifts from Germans and have nothing to do with his religion. I recognize in these gifts the same strand of German Romanticism and spiritual cosmopolitanism that, as a teen, I encountered and loved in the Swiss-German writer Herman Hesse's 1922 novel about the life of the Buddha, *Siddhartha*. For Westerners in search of alternatives to the evils of

European warfare and racism, all non-Western religions seem to offer similar relief. Alongside these various statues sit the delicate staffs, helmets, crowns, and jewelry that various gods under Babá Murah's guidance will carry or wear when they possess their priests on festival days.

Sitting at the door of this second-floor consultation room is the trickster spirit Zé Pelintra—half Exu, half spirit of the dead, and protector of both the trickster spirits and the human tricksters of the street. Babá Murah's *caboclo*, or Brazilian Indian spirit, Seu Ventania, sits in the corner farthest from the front door, near the entryway to the sacred room of the *orixá* altars. During private divination sessions restricted to members of the temple community, Seu Ventania mounts Babá Murah. Although each of these beings includes an anthropomorphic image, his true power resides in a bowl of sacred substances underneath it.

Like his brothers- and sisters-in-the-saint (*irmãos-de-santo*), Babá Murah pays careful but not always fully obedient attention to the dictates of his own *mãe-de-santo*, or chief priestess, Mãe Beata of Iemanjá. For example, Babá Murah told me that Mãe Beata forbids the worship of Zé Pelintra and of his female counterpart, Maria Padilha, or Pombagira, since these entities bring trouble. Many of his brothers- and sisters-in-the-saint also defy Mãe Beata, because these mischievous, Eshu-related beings bring wealth and fame, too. Beyond that, when they mount their priests, dance, prophecy, and bless their audiences, everyone has fun.

The central function of Candomblé is to maintain personal and social health by diminishing the presence of some forces and otherworldly beings in the body and the community and by making, installing, maintaining, and enhancing the presence of others. Among the entities that need to be diminished in the temple are the unknown dead and Exus who have been sent by one's enemies. Certain other entities facilitate independence from one's elders and, so, are more attractive to entrepreneurial priests. Others, at least in Brazil, are more conducive to the respectability and therefore to the public and bourgeois sponsorship of a temple. Such beings are more attractive to the Candomblé establishment, which has more to gain from sponsorship than from entrepreneurialism and lively, plebeian entertainment (Matory 2005). However, as the case of Babá Murah's Zé Pelintra suggests, the unwelcomeness of any given spirit or force is provisional, and the ethic of managing heterogeneity and tension tends to prevail over the ethic—or even possibility—of completely or permanently removing any force or spirit from the life of the person or the community.

Locked away from public view, also on the second floor but behind the farthest door, is the heart of the temple, known as the *peji*. In that room sit the bowls and soup tureens containing the substance and power of the *orixá*

gods—the herb-bathed and blood-fed stones, beads, and seashells of Oxum; Iemanjá; Omolu; the god of thunder and lightning, Xangô; the god of wisdom and purity, Oxalá; the god of herbal healing, Ossaim; the god of the hunt, Oxóssi; and the god of war and iron, Ogum, who rules my head. In the holy of holies, behind the ultimate door within this most sacred room, sits the sacred vessel of the goddess of wind and storm, Iansã, the ruler of Babá Murah's head. Her feeding and her festival are the culmination of each annual cycle of sacred festivals and the peak of the community's effervescence.

Babá Murah's world of spirited things sits at the center of one of twenty-first-century Berlin's most fashionable neighborhoods, and the festivals that keep them alive draw not only Brazilian and Cuban immigrants but also white European seekers from all over Germany, as well as Scandinavia. Yet the temple and its clientele are not "the return of the repressed" but the culmination of a long circum-Atlantic dialectic of mutual construction and transformation between Africans and Europeans (with moments of South Asian involvement), between Protestants and Catholics, between royals and plebeians, and between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat over the value of things and the obligations those things imply among people. Babá Murah's *Hinterhof* is not a place of pure otherness in the heart—and much less on the ruins—of Hegel's rationalist, anti-African city. It is a crossroads where some of the most momentous intellectual trends on the Atlantic perimeter meet again and face each other with renewed awareness.

Two Revolutions in Dialogue on the Atlantic Perimeter

William Pietz (1985) argues that the concept of the fetish originated on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century West African coast, where Europeans condemned Africans' manner of attributing value and agency to material things. I prefer to describe the origin of what he called the "problem of the fetish" as a bilateral *disagreement* over the proper value and agency of people and things, because the African parties in this contest of ideas and social practices had cogent opinions and practices of their own, hitherto neglected in current discussion of fetishism—ideas that were highly effective in ordering the societies of the Guinea Coast and in preserving African advantages over their European trading partners. And they remain highly effective in organizing African-diaspora communities.

Pietz usefully calls attention to European merchants' use of African consecrated things as metaphors in their critique of Roman Catholicism and of aristocratic governance in Europe. It might be argued, then, that the Guinea-Coast encounter catalyzed a bourgeois-led European social revolution, the Enlightenment. At the crux of this revolution were debates about not only the worth

and agency of things but also the relative worth of Africans, Europeans, and different types of Europeans in the circum-Atlantic political economy. As articulated by Hegel, Marx, and Freud, the anti-African trope of the fetish was central to a sequence of European social revolutions intent on conferring upon the European bourgeoisie and proletariat rights once limited to the European aristocracy, and doing so at the symbolic and material expense of Africans.

However, this was a moment of crisis for the emerging merchant classes of both Europe *and* Africa. It might be argued that this same sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Afro-European trade catalyzed some major reforms in West African spirit-possession religion and governance, as well—reforms that distinguish Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá religion and politics, Brazilian Candomblé, and Cuban Santería/Ocha from the likely antecedents of Ọ̀yọ́ imperial religion, as well as from West African Ewe religion and Haitian Vodou. From the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, the expansion of the inland Ọ̀yọ́ kingdom and its push to the Atlantic coastal ports involved not only literal equestrianism, which is well-known, but also the unique amplification of political delegation through royal wives, as well as possession priests and other palace officials who were (and are) analogized to horses and wives (Matory [1994] 2005).

So the Guinea-Coast encounter of European merchants with African monarchs, merchants, and priests catalyzed *two* social revolutions—one Euro-Atlantic and the other Afro-Atlantic. On the one hand, the Euro-Atlantic social revolution advocated the inherent equality of all white men and their individual, rights-bearing autonomy from one another. This new social ideal was based on the model of a band of brothers, and the prime actor imagined in this vision of society and history is a white man. On the other, the simultaneous Yorùbá-Atlantic social revolution idealized the hand-in-glove, hierarchical connection between actors from different families, ethnic groups, and places—a hierarchical connection modeled on royal marriage and horsemanship. The prime historical actor imagined in this model of society and history is a black royal wife (Matory [1994] 2005).

In many ways, Babá Murah precedes me in my project, which is to put the heirs of these two social revolutions back into explicit dialogue with each other. He does so in the service of community and healing, while I do so in order to enhance our understanding of what each party separately takes for granted about the value and agency of people and things. This dialogue also has the benefit of showing us, first, that European social theories are as material and as materially interested as the phenomena that they describe as "fetishism" and, second, that African spirited things are as filled with thoughtful and socially positioned ideas as are European social theories. *The Fetish Revisited* places Marx's and Freud's influential theories of the fetish in dialogue with the human-assembled gods of the West African Yorùbá, Brazilian

Candomblé, Cuban Santería/Ocha, and Haitian Vodou—that is, the gods who are the implicit point of comparison, or "source" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), in this long-standing European metaphor for misplaced value and agency. Through vivid color images and ethnographic analyses of these gods, I show that Marx's and Freud's conceptions of the fetish both illuminate and misrepresent Africa's human-made gods. I ask of historical materialism and psychoanalysis the same socially contextualizing questions that anthropologists, deeply influenced by Marx and Freud, have applied to the study of African and African-inspired religions. I also show that the Afro-Atlantic gods illuminate the culturally specific, materially conditioned, and materially embodied nature of Marx's and Freud's theories.

Ethnological Schadenfreude and Lopsided Ambivalence in Central Europe

Marx and Engels turned the Enlightenment idea of the fetish, long an explicit description of African spirited things, into a household word and a leading metaphor in the theorization of their fellow Europeans' foolishness. I argue that Marx's and Freud's political programs and rhetorical strategies were shaped by the nineteenth-century rise of capitalism, overseas imperialism, pseudoscientific racism, and Jim Crow, as well as these men's own class insecurity. They were also shaped by these men's desire as secular Jews to escape the stigma, exclusion, and murder suffered by religious Jews.

Moreover, Marx's and Freud's theories rested on material furniture that might itself be described as a range of fetishes. Historical materialism and psychoanalysis invest great affect and agency in certain material things whose conflicting meanings endorse rival social configurations. And the vigor and influence of both historical materialism and psychoanalysis owe much to their principal authors' simultaneous identification with Europe's African victim and anxiety to prove themselves worthy of access to the privileges of white Europeanness based upon their superiority to that victim. Inspired by both Freud's fetishism theory and the Afro-Atlantic religions, this analysis of ambiguous things and ambivalent theorists is intended as a new lesson to both Marxists and Freudians. The hypothesis that the most enduring fetishes are ambivalent, a point dear to Freud's own theory of the fetish, amplifies my earlier ethnography of what I call "ethnological Schadenfreude" (Matory 2015b)—that is, the strategy of middling status groups to seek membership in higher-status groups by assenting to, and indeed proclaiming, the inferiority of a third, more vulnerable party.

The Fetish Revisited is both an elaboration on my earlier work about the Afro-Atlantic religions (e.g., Matory 2005, [1994] 2005) and an application

of my more recent work on ethnological Schadenfreude (2015b) among US Americans of African descent to the eighteenth- to twenty-first-century interactions between Africans and Europeans that have profoundly transformed the intellectual lives of both populations since then. Ethnological Schadenfreude is specifically a process of *ethnic* self-construction, or ethnogenesis, by which people of stigmatized populations endeavor to escape their stigma and its related social encumbrances by deflecting that stigma onto a population whom they endeavor to construct as lower. However, a similar process characterizes class and national identities, and many religious ones, as well. While the justice-minded might expect stigmatized populations to stand up and denounce the unfairness of racial, cultural, class, and gender chauvinism generally, I hypothesize that the ambitious members of stigmatized groups more often declare to their tormentors, in so many words, "It is not we who deserve stigmatization and oppression; it's those people over there. *We're* actually ideal versions of *you*!"

It is worth reminding the reader that even today's most respected nations and peoples remain haunted by stigmatization and feelings of inferiority. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was French language and culture that marked elite status in the politically divided lands of German-speaking Europe, and German was regarded as a peasant language. In the mid-nineteenth century, Marx ranked even the most powerful of the German states, Prussia, with Russia in its political backwardness compared to France, as well as its economic backwardness compared to Great Britain. The people Marx sought to lead were chiefly the diaspora of German workers who, as economic refugees, sought work and higher wages in other lands.

After the Frenchman Napoleon Bonaparte defeated the combined ethnically German armies of Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria, and Württemberg at Leipzig, middle-class German-speaking intellectuals like Herder, Fichte, and Hegel tended to become more German-nationalist and to fret that their nation was behind the curve of European progress with respect to national unity, industrialization, and the possession of extra-European colonies. And they were driven by a desire to prove their equality with France and Britain. In sum, the burghers suffered under the eighteenth-century premise of French cultural superiority, while their nineteenth-century successors endured the premise that the whole world was an evolutionary ladder with the Anglo-Saxons or the French at its apex, a premise also implicit in French and British anthropology of the time.[1]

The German anthropologist Claudia Rauhut argues that Bismarck organized the Berlin Conference of 1884, whose aim was to divide Africa up among the European imperial powers, precisely in order to assert a role for

Germany in a European expansionist project hitherto dominated by the British and French. Bismarck and other Germans' sense that their nation had been outpaced in this project, adds Rauhut, was the reason that Germany's late nineteenth-century effort to acquire overseas colonies was so efficient and brutal, as illustrated by the heartless effort to exterminate the Herero and Nama peoples of what would become Southwest Africa and, later, Namibia (personal communication, November 2015). In the 1930s, according to the German anthropologist Richard Kuba, this German feeling of national backwardness and inferiority extended to a sense of the inadequacy of their European landholdings (or *Lebensraum*), as well, adding a psychological motivation to the well-known material motivations behind German expansionism *within* Europe (personal communication, October 2014). In the twentieth century, Germany's cycle of compensatory self-assertion and ignominious defeat rests upon and amplifies a long history of shame and fear of inferiority.

More broadly, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, nationalist political discourses and the nationally diverse sciences of race, folklore, and ethnology all embodied the efforts of diverse European peoples and classes to articulate and promote their respective places in the emergent hierarchy of nations and empires. Through their contribution of diverse ethnological artifacts to national museums, royals, new industrial elites, and missionaries (who often came from peasant and other subaltern European social origins) were locating themselves as knowing subjects and respectable citizens of the emergent bourgeois nation-state, defined by a shared superiority to the Africans and other non-Europeans whose crafts and bodies were "scientifically" displayed.[2] Thus, the theories of social-evolutionary and racial difference that structured these national museum exhibitions and other posttheological narrations of human history—including Marx's social-evolutionist historical materialism and Freud's social-evolutionist history of the mind—were not just about the non-European Other. They were also about why the narrator of this history deserved to be regarded as superior to that Other and not inferior to a range of fellow European populations that had previously—on the grounds of caste, class, region, ethnicity, or religion—professed superiority to the narrator and his people.

German-speaking central Europe hosted a range of such compensatory, chauvinist responses to feelings of national inferiority.

In the twentieth century, German feelings of collective inferiority to other Europeans formed the root of Nazism. Comparisons between Nazism and Donald J. Trump's populist nationalism—greatly subsidized by working-class and downwardly mobile whites' sense of inferiority and defeat—are not hyperbolic. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* ([1925–26] 1941) begins not with a proclamation of Aryan superiority but with a lament about the social disorder of the

German worker's household and about his lack of pride in himself compared to the French worker. Today, Germans remain a deeply embarrassed nation, torn between gratitude and indebtedness—on the one hand, gratitude for US mercy and kindness after World War II and the economic prosperity that resulted and, on the other, the humiliation of not only having collectively committed a heinous crime against other Europeans but also being a loser dominated by a network of foreign powers.

Yet the stigmatized are equally capable of self-interested empathy with fellow sufferers, and ethnological Schadenfreude is seldom uninterrupted by or unalloyed with such empathy. Offering an alternative to the idea that German speakers were underdeveloped versions of an ideal embodied in France and Great Britain, nineteenth-century German ethnology advanced the idea that every people has its own culture-specific imagination and quality of feeling that makes that people different from—but not inferior or superior to—other peoples. Following the late eighteenth-century cultural pluralism of Johann von Gottfried Herder (who originated the concept of the *Volksgeist*), his nineteenth-century successors Alexander von Humboldt and Adolf Bastian and his twentieth-century successors Leo Frobenius and Felix von Luschan identified in Africa's dignity a metaphor and metonym of German national dignity. It was Gustav E. Klemm, a Saxon, who first employed the current anthropological usage of the term *Kultur* (culture), which presupposed the equality of all peoples rather than their placement on a racial or cultural scale of rank (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 10). Thus, if my argument is correct, it is to a German reaction against feelings of national inferiority that we owe the tremendous contributions of both German gentile Leo Frobenius and German Jewish Franz Boas to cultural anthropology, African studies, and African American studies, as well as to Francophone African and Afro-Caribbean literature.[3]

In principle, the stigmatized, whether individuals or nations, have the option to join with a broad swath of their fellow sufferers to oppose all stigma and oppression. However, their more common reaction—increasingly common as circumstances thrust them toward the bottom of a hierarchy—is to seek the approval of their oppressors by deflecting their stigma onto others.

Compared to their German-speaking contemporaries (not to mention Freud's world-famous and equally non-Aryan cubist and fauvist contemporaries in Paris), Marx and Freud stand out for having chosen to demean Africans, even if (and perhaps because) they partially identified with Africans.[4] Since Hegel's *Philosophy of History* ([1822] 1956), Marx and Freud arguably have done more than any other scholars to turn African religion into a commonsense, universal metaphor for all incorrect valuation of things. As assimilated Jews, they represented some of the most extreme instances of German

speakers' collective desire to convince others of their normalcy within post-Enlightenment European definitions of humanity and national citizenship. The intensity of their compensatory degradation of Africa seems to be indebted to the fact that their race, their regional origins, and their class made them especially vulnerable to exclusion from the dominant camp of unmarked European bourgeois whiteness.

Hannah Arendt (1944) describes a range of personality types that emerge from what she calls the "pariah" status of European Jews since their emancipation, including the hapless *schlemihl*, the impudent little guy, the rebel, the social critic, and the art collector. But she highlights the folly of the assimilated Jewish "parvenu"—an "inner slave" who perfectly adopts gentile culture, cooperates in his own people's oppression, and, in the end, suffers the same fate as other Jews. Sander Gilman sees signs of the parvenu in Marx and, to a far greater degree, Freud (personal communication, April 27, 2017). I focus on Marx's and Freud's use of the term "fetish," however, not because they were the only central Europeans in their day to employ the term in a way that singled out Africans for opprobrium but because the extremeness of their social condition highlights the exemplary human motivation behind this put-down. The other reason that I focus on them is that their theories of the fetish have been particularly fruitful for me, and I ascribe this fruitfulness to Marx's and Freud's own special degree of social ambiguity and ambivalence about their place in the global—and especially circum-Atlantic—empire of white Christendom.

Marx suffered under a radical shift in his own class status and Freud under a radical shift in the political status of Jews in central Europe. Marx's and Freud's own social ambiguity inspired a double-consciousness richly implicit in their theories—an uncertainty over whether to disambiguate themselves from Africans and claim whiteness or to dignify and defend their fellow victims of racial oppression. This ambivalence about human equality is implicit in their rhetorical use—indeed, fetishization—of the African, the enslaved African American, and our gods. However, the outcome of their ambivalence was, in the end, lopsided.

Freud's theory of fetishism (1927) seems a thinly veiled metaphor for his own situation as an assimilated Jew in an increasingly antisemitic Europe. And, for him, ambivalence is central to the structure of the fetish. According to Freud, the fetish embodies both the fearful hostility of the boy to his father and the boy's desire, in the end, to assume the father's role as an aggressor. Likewise, I will argue, Freud's rhetorical use of Africans and our gods embodies both his fearful hostility toward the white gentile father and his desire to impress and, in the end, to become that father.

This analysis draws force from the Freudian premise that the most highly charged fetishes enable the subject both to identify with the potential victim and, in alternation, to mime the safety and the power of the victimizer. "A fetish . . . doubly derived from contrary ideas . . . is of course especially durable. In other instances the divided attitude shows itself in what the fetishist does with his fetish" (Freud 1927: 157). For example, Freud hypothesized that, on the one hand, a patient who fetishized braids and enjoyed cutting them off of a woman's head looked upon the braid as a sign that his mother had escaped castration, since, when he met the female owner of the phallus-shaped coiffure, she still appeared to have a phallus. This sight thus relieved him of the fear that he himself was under a threat of castration by the father. On the other hand, in cutting off the braid, the part of the male fetishist that identified strongly with his castrating father enacted the role of the castrator (ibid.). Hence, the adult son's fetishization of the braid both reassured him that he would not be castrated and mimed the threat of castration to sons like him who break the father's rules.

It is difficult for me to take seriously Freud's premise that every boy mistakes his mother's genitalia for a product of castration by the father and therefore as a threat of the boy's castration. However, many consecrated things and ritual actions do appear to dramatize opposite roles in similarly hierarchical relationships, and they appear to be used to enact both caretaking, or defensive, and punitive roles in those relationships. The affective power of all fetishes appears to draw on this semantic, or hermeneutical, duality. The fetish cuts both ways. However, diachronically, the ritual process tends to culminate in ethnological Schadenfreude and the triumph of the father.

One key factor that makes both European and African sacralized ideas and things "fetishes" by my heuristic definition is the context of political, economic, or military *inequality* among the parties debating the proper order of the universe. The term "fetish" indexes the speaker's condemnation of one human-posited and human-enforced socio-cosmological order in the service of affirming another. Calling something a fetish is, most obviously, an assertion of the speaker's difference from and superiority to the fetishist. By claiming the right to judge the health and humanity of the African or Africanized Other, the speaker—whether a gentile but nonroyal citizen of royalist and francophile Prussia or an assimilated Jew in an increasingly republican but antisemitic Europe—includes himself in the company of people exempted from inferiority.

Since accusations of fetishism are not usually reciprocated by their victims, they index a defensive middling position in a global status hierarchy. However, in this book I reciprocate the charge. *The Fetish Revisited* thus submits

the mental images and worldly furniture of Marx's and Freud's theories to comparison with the African spirited things that these men—partly in an effort to exempt their own people and ideas from the impending threat of invalidation—have fetishized. As I compare the books held sacrosanct in Europe and the altars held sacrosanct in Africa and its diaspora, I leave it to the reader to assess the effects of my own ambiguous positionality—as both a child of Africa and a Western scholar.

Just as Black America is the locus classicus of ethnological Schadenfreude (Matory 2015b), assimilated European Jews in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may well be the locus classicus of ambivalence. Likewise, the great Afro-Atlantic capitals of western Cuba, Bahia, and the Guinea Coast are capitals of ambiguity, a most-famous example of which is syncretism. In the impoverished quarters of Brazil and Cuba, statues and lithographs of Roman Catholic saints may, to put it simply, represent Roman Catholic saints or African gods, depending upon the setting and the momentary disposition of the viewer. In these settings, the borders between self and other, masters and slaves, Black and White, foreigners and compatriots, gods and saints are as unclear as they are clear in the dominant and segregated Protestant North Atlantic. The joint lesson of these cases is that the most enduring fetishes of both assimilated central European Jews and the scions of the West African merchant-monarchs are fraught with ambivalence inspired by middling positions in a racially stratified Atlantic world. Strategic assimilation and disambiguation are perhaps the most compelling motives behind the rituals, jokes, and fetish making of these populations.

Hence, I will argue, apparently abstract European social theories are no more universal, eternal "truths" than African gods are. Moreover, both gods and social theories are conceptual and material constructions that speak most vividly and truthfully about the world when they acknowledge their own social origins. European social theories and Afro-Atlantic gods are equally born of their creators' social ambiguity and lopsided ambivalence.

Africa as Europe's X-Ray

> But our measurements of the vast lands of the self are far too small or too narrow if we leave out the great kingdom of the unconscious, that true inner Africa.
> —Jean Paul, *Selina oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*

Both historical materialism and psychoanalysis follow a post-Enlightenment tradition of making black and brown people into exemplars of mental dispositions that Europeans, as "civilized" people, have overcome. These theories also follow another equally European and post-Enlightenment tradition—

that of looking more deeply into oneself and rediscovering a stereotypical Africa right there in one's own European soul. For Freud, this "inner Africa" was a raging sexual brute called the "id"—an entity cloaked in darkness by the veneer of Western civilization and uncovered through the study of Western neurotics, Western children, and, in its purest form, the brown or black "savage."[5] Europe's projection of its own "dark" heart onto Africa is, to my mind, the paradigm and pinnacle of all fetishism. Hegel and Marx endeavored to expel this darkness from Europe, while Freud vacillated between efforts to show, on the one hand, that assimilated Jews like him have repressed and risen above this darkness and, on the other, that this darkness inhabited civilized gentiles as much as civilized Jews. Thus, particularly in Freudian analyses of fetishism, Africans can play opposite rhetorical roles—sometimes as the antitype of civilized humanity and sometimes as the prototypes of a shared humanity. Yet both formulations are studiously ignorant of African self-understandings and aspirations, reducing Africans to rhetorical tropes rather than human beings.

The Berlin-based cultural and literary historian Hartmut Böhme ([2006] 2014) argues that fetishes are not new in European cultural history: they are both ancient and omnipresent. Ironically, his own critique of other Europeans embodies the very fetishism that he criticizes. Böhme defines a fetish as an emotionally charged symbol that replaces the real phenomenon it represents, hides it, represses it, or makes it unidentifiable to the believer. For him, the fetish is a thing that appears to bear a power beyond human authorship, a power that both threatens the author and believer with harm and embodies his or her hope of salvation from that harm.

I might offer the following example. Medieval European principalities fought wars to capture or to retain bone fragments, burial shrouds, and alleged fragments of the Holy Cross, items that both commemorated the horrible deaths of the martyrs and promised mystical healing and even protection from horrible deaths. Among the demonstrably material powers of these relics was their ability to attract tens of thousands of pilgrims to the church that housed them and consumers to the nearby markets. Conversely, they also induced rival principalities to raid the relics' owners and, in order to reroute those profit-generating pilgrims, take the relics home.

Böhme adds that, in Europe, fetishism is not a thing of the past, even as many Europeans reassure themselves of their own evolved rationality and insightfulness by accusing others—non-European and European—of fetishism. For example, Böhme bids us to look at the monumental architecture built by Hitler and Stalin, which, in Böhme's view, differs little from so-called African fetishes in its power to conjure collective imaginations and relationships. In the same way, no more or less realistically than African worshippers,

supposedly rational Europeans in capitalist society enact a form of fetishism by falsely imagining that the foods, fashion, and celluloid fantasies they consume will bring them love and respect.

Like William Pietz, Böhme claims no knowledge of African or African-inspired religions, but he does point out the ethnocentrism of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment European thinkers' presumption that Europeans are categorically more rational and less fetishistic than Africans. He does so with some support from the French historian of religion and diplomat Charles de Brosses (1709–77), the originator of the term "fetishism" and the main touchstone of Marx's and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European philosophers' references to the concept. De Brosses argued that ancient Greek, ancient Egyptian, and contemporary West African religion shared a *common* belief in the magical powers of certain objects (Böhme 2014: 156–59, 245).

Nonetheless, like the majority of critics of fetishism, Böhme reserves the prototypically African-coded term "fetishism" for phenomena he regards as disproportionate, reality-distorting, injurious, and, in a word, monstrous—such as the causes of overeating and anorexia, excessive devotion to fashion, phallocentric sexism in film, the nail fetishes employed by German civilians during World War I to fortify the national army ([2006] 2014: 200), and authoritarian architecture. Despite his occasional circumspection, Böhme's refrain that these monstrous phenomena constitute "the Africa in us" actually amplifies the anti-African prejudice at the heart of the Enlightenment, historical materialism, and psychoanalysis, rather than second-guessing it (Böhme [2006] 2014: 272, also 7). The ambivalence at the heart of Böhme's twenty-first-century critique of the ethnocentrism of Marx's fetish concept actually echoes the deep ambivalence of Marx and Freud about Africa. In fact, Marx and Freud, like African priests, have themselves created Janus-like fetishes that mediate between the roles of oppressor and oppressed. But Böhme, like Pietz before him, details only the European side in the Afro-European dialogue about the relationship between the world's explicit realities and its hidden ones.

The Agency of Things

In both Marx's historical materialism and Freud's psychoanalysis, physical things are the classical referents of the term "fetish," with the implication that the thing is merely a mistaken vehicle for a social relationship that a reasonable or mentally healthy person understands is really immaterial. Similarly, the prestige of theory rests on the premise that it transcends particular

peoples, historical moments, actions and things. Yet, as Böhme ([2006] 2014) points out, even the most supposedly abstract theoretical ideas are made up of mental images of things. In a similar abstraction, the practitioners of kink tend to focus their definitions of the fetish on idiosyncratic *practices*, despite the fact that those practices almost always rely on an elaborately symbolic and affectively charged array of paraphernalia. It is the foremost premise of the present argument that ideas, actions, and things all depend on each other in the conduct of social life. What are the implications of the thingliness, or materiality, of the fetish?

The networked nature of people, ideas, and things is the focus of a rich scholarly literature, but we must avoid the risk of exaggerating the agency of things, as things are never self-sufficient in their meaning. Like other things that matter to people, a fetish depends on an infrastructure, or network, of people, animals, plants, places, and other things, for its existence and its functioning. For example, a piano is made of metal and wood, is made by metal- and wood-workers, and needs a building to support its weight and protect it from moisture and rapid fluctuations of temperature. Moreover, its importance in people's social and emotional lives depends on people's continuing to tune it, play it, gather around it, listen to it, and interpret its sounds based upon familiarity with a tradition of other people's having engaged in similar conduct and, often, upon the recollection of specific performers, occasions, and sounds associated with and triggered by that particular piano. In sum, like other things, the fetish depends on and is of a piece with a network of people, animals, plants, idea-images, sacred words, conventions, rituals, and techniques that actively sustains it.

In this analysis of the role of things (such as Eshu's hat and his *ọ̀gọ̀*) in the making of human plans, identities, relationships, and hierarchies, I am partly inspired by Bruno Latour and his actor-network theory (e.g., Latour 2010; also Hodder 2012). In scientific research as in worship, the very reality of the things we investigate or worship depends on a network of instruments, dreams, people, social relationships, and rules. The things we work with in science, worship, and other activities do not necessarily possess volition. However, Latour argues that their shape, materials, and need for maintenance and adjustment inextricably shape how their users see the world, as well as how they think and act.

Yorùbá-Atlantic conceptions of agency both contradict and amplify Latour's sense of what things do in the world. For example, one implication of Yorùbá-Atlantic practice for actor-network theory is that no single fetishized thing can be looked at in isolation (see also Hodder 2012). Specifically, the

fetishization of a thing is always of a piece with a network of things from which or to which value has been shifted and with a set of rival populations competing to dictate the terms of value relations among those things. Hence, to refer to a single physical item as a fetish is also to refer to the network of other items, people, and relationships that constitutes its field of power. In this discussion, I will at times refer to the part of a fetish that stands for the whole and, at other times, to the whole that stands for the part.

A school of art history allied to actor-network theory (e.g., Freedberg 1989; Gell 1998; Morgan 2005; Belting 1994) also emphasizes the power of material things—namely, artistic images and configurations of images—to compel certain ways of thinking, seeing, and feeling, and it documents the long history of "premodern" Europeans' recognition of the intrinsic power of sacred paintings and statues to do so. Despite centuries of Protestant iconoclasm, Latour and most of these other scholars doubt that so-called modern Europeans have really overcome the compelling power of material images and things. Rather, the modern iconoclast's othering denunciation of Africans and of other ostensible nonmoderns is but a self-deception concealing an alternative range of falsely empowered modern European fetishes, ranging from modern art and consumer goods to monumental architecture and laboratory equipment.

While these insights are fundamental to the following analysis, I stop short of the recently fashionable abandonment of the idea of the "symbol" and of the Saussurean premise that signs are—more often than not and in more ways than not—arbitrary. Of course, there are onomatopoeias, and words are shaped by a nonarbitrary etymology and by meaningfully structured patterns of inflection. However, it is virtually impossible to locate the exact counterpart of a word and category from one language in another language. And a referent recognized in one language may not be recognized as a reality in another language. Such incommensurability between semiotic codes and between perspectives is the fundamental condition behind the phenomena that I call "fetishes." A single material thing can also sustain more than one meaning or use, just as two different material things can be subjected to the same meaning or use. Latour and Hodder are wise to remind us of the networked nature of agency, and Böhme correctly highlights the dependency of thought on references to material things. However, as imaginative animals, people can project a virtually infinite array of ideas and organize an extraordinary array of collective activities around any given material thing, The extraordinary affective power of the fetish—and of the theorizing conducted in its name—arises from the contrary meanings that participants in a single cultural dialogue attribute to the fetish and the contrary social projects that they use it to endorse.

Ultimately, I ask in this book, what kind of rhetorical sign is the so-called fetish? European theorists have long presupposed their own asymmetrical privilege to apply this term to other people's highly cathected things and their own invulnerability to the accusation of fetishism. Yet the greatest lessons of this rhetorical sign may lie in its potential to reveal the social conditions of the intercultural dialogue that produced the so-called fetish. In this intercultural dialogue, I highlight what those who are normally accused of fetishism have to say back to our accusers. This talking back is in the very nature of the fetish, and a close examination of the contrary projections of meaning, affect, and power onto material things illuminates the contrasting positionalities and the rival social projects advocated by the interlocutors. This is not to minimize the affecting power of things but to highlight—as the Afro-Atlantic priests tend to do—the dependency of that power on continual human effort, cooperation, and rivalry.

The Priests Talk Back to Marx and Freud

The post-fifteenth-century Atlantic perimeter is not just a trade system but a geographically and materially coded repertoire of the self (Roach 1996). Hegel, Marx, and Freud are not the only ones who looked to the far shores of the Atlantic and found touchstones for their own respective self-definitions. Post-Enlightenment Europeans might favor the idea of Africa as a distant ancestor to or antithesis of themselves, but a temple of the African-inspired Candomblé religion—a product of the Atlantic slave trade and of Brazil's ongoing interaction with the Guinea Coast—sits at the heart of the fashionable Kreuzberg neighborhood of Berlin, Germany's and Europe's reunified capital. And the chief priest of the Ilê Obá Silekê temple, Babá Murah, has as much to say about Germany as Hegel, Marx, and Freud had to say about Africa. But his knowledge of Germany is considerably more empirical.

Babá Murah likes Berlin, but he finds his work there exhausting. One hard part of returning from his rare vacations is facing the constancy of work—cleaning and maintaining the temple facility—and the difficulty of continually switching back and forth between the semipossessed state required to perform divination and the fully conscious state required to do business in Berlin and deal with life's quotidian problems there. The hardest aspect of living in Germany, though, is the spiritual environment, which he calls "heavy" (*pesado*). "So many people—innocents and people who did not even know how they died—have died here [during wars]," he says, adding, "The whole of Berlin was destroyed." He likes Berlin, but every time he moves into a new apartment or place of business, he has to "clean, clean, and clean, because so many bad spirits [*espíritus ruins*] are there." Until he

removed it, there was even a swastika, the word for which Babá Murah did not know, on the wall of his current apartment. And you have to keep cleaning, he says, because those spirits come back. Babá Murah says that his mission here is to "light a candle, giving light to these spirits."

But even that is difficult because "here, [people] don't have time; they have appointments (aqui, eles não têm tempo; têm hora [lit., they have "hour"]). "People make an appointment for a three o'clock consultation—they're always making appointments—and they have to be gone by five." They do not have or make the time fully to absorb the message of the *orixás* and then perform the necessary rituals. The slow rhythm of healing and harmonization with the Other world is as quintessential to *orixá*-worship as quick reply, production, and turnover are to late capitalism in Germany. In quotidian Berlin, as Marx, too, understood, the hour is the unit of value production. By contrast, in the temple, the chief time units are the annual calendar and the passage from one generation to the next.

It is for this reason and others that Babá Murah says he is not German and never will be. However, when he returns to Brazil, he also feels like a foreigner there. Not only do Brazilians identify something German in his manner of acting and speaking, but he himself sees things that are happening in Brazil and must ask himself, "What is this?!" Babá Murah cannot deny that Germany has become part of his life and his temple a Berlin landmark. He has been transformed by his role as an intermediary among multiple worlds. But, in his discomfort, he reveals the competing values of those worlds and, thus, the structure and substance of the fetish. The real-world Brazilian, Cuban, Haitian, and Nigerian worshippers of the Afro-Atlantic gods are as complex and ambivalent as any European social theorist. The difference is that few of the priests will construct the foreign Other as the antithesis of their ideal selves. Rather, it is the interaction with the Other that, quite normatively, makes them who they are. Just as the Abrahamic religions profess the exclusion of other religions, the Enlightenment and its scions have professed a relationship of oppositeness and antagonism to the Afro-Atlantic religions. Yet, when we most fervently declare ourselves the opposite of something, that thing becomes firmly embedded in our essence and consciousness. This book is a prolonged reflection on the Afro-German conversation at the foundation of fetish theory, a conversation incomplete without the input of the long marginalized priests and gods of the Black Atlantic. Babá Murah has brought them directly to the capital of German politics, philosophy, and ambivalence about the German people's role in Europe and the world.

My aim is to extend this dialogue and refine our social hermeneutics by giving full voice to the African side of this dialogue. I will present actual Afro-Atlantic priestly voices, communal rituals, and spirited things about which

Marx and Freud so freely and loosely speculated, as well as my own comparative observations of the half-dozen Afro-Atlantic religious traditions on which I have now conducted thirty-six years of participant observation. I specialize in the study of what Robert Farris Thompson calls the "Yoruba-Atlantic" religions—West African Yorùbá religion, Brazilian Candomblé Quêto-Nagô, and Cuban Santería/Ocha, and I also have considerable experience among the Fòn-Atlantic traditions of Brazilian Candomblé Jeje, Haitian Vodou, and Beninese *vodun*-worship, as well as some experience in the Kongo-Atlantic tradition of Cuban Palo, the Congolese (formerly Zaïrean) veneration of the *nkisi* gods, and the Cross River–inspired tradition of Cuban Abakuá.

Within these traditions, most of my friends and mentors have been priests of spirit possession, who, at the height of ritual, lose consciousness and turn into gods, moved by a consciousness foreign to the medium's own. Other priests within the Yorùbá-Atlantic traditions, known as *babaláwo* in West Africa and *babalaos* in Cuba, both priests of the Ifá oracle, transact with the Other world exclusively through conscious divination—that is, the casting of palm nuts and other consecrated implements whose numerical permutations correspond to extensive and somewhat standardized information about the supplicant's problem and its solution. Within these traditions, I belong to a category of uninitiated guests who are normally denied access to the most sacred spaces and information. However, thirty-six years of friendship and my own gifts of sacred information and goods from distant Afro-Atlantic locales have afforded me a degree of access unusual for a noninitiate.

The priests I have befriended during these decades reside on multiple continents. Many of them are highly cosmopolitan, living and working at the intersection of Western and African populations and lifeways. For example, Babá Murah has lived in Berlin for decades. Ìyá Ọ̀ṣun Òṣogbo, Adedoyin Talabi Faniyi, was reared by a white Austrian refugee from post–World War II Europe. Another of my mentors is Marie Maude Evans, a Manbo Asogwe—that is, a priestess of the highest possible rank in the Vodou religion of southern Haiti. Residing in both Boston and Jacmel, Haiti, Manmi Maude—*Manmi* being the title of respect that is her due—is not only a Haitian Vodou priestess but also a Western-trained mental-health care professional. The Haitian Revolution and lore about the role of African "fetishism" in it appear to have played a central role in Hegel's early nineteenth-century thinking about German politics and history (Buck-Morss 2000), and the US occupation of Haiti (1914–32) began as an effort to end Germany's lively commercial interaction with that island nation (Jean-Daniel Lafontant, in Matory 2015d). Oggún Fumi, a Santería/Ocha priestess from Santiago de Cuba, is knowledgeable about Marxism-Leninism. Thus, like the theories of Hegel, Marx, and Freud, the Afro-Atlantic gods are themselves indebted in surprising ways to

an old Afro-Germanic dialogue. In the orbit of other very current political ideologies, two of my main *santero* mentors in the United States—Babá Esteban "Steve" Quintana and the *oriaté* diviner I call Joe Alarcón—are both proud Republicans. And David Font-Navarrete is not only a Santería/Ocha priest but also an ethnomusicologist and writing instructor at Duke University. His priestly networks bridge Miami, New York, Havana, Mexico City, and Durham.

Hence, these priests and friends do not represent a frozen, homogeneous "ethnographic present." While they share certain habits of speech and ritual action that suggest some consistency in their thinking across space and over time, I do not suppose that all of these priests agree about everything or that what any given priest tells me is what he or she believes in every situation, has always believed, or will always believe. Rather, at any given moment, a priestly interlocutor is engaging his or her situation—including my questions and challenges—with a subset of the available precedents and variants on a subset of the principles previously articulated or heard in his or her sacred community. One must suppose that these engagements are partly strategic, which is also what I suppose about the writings of Hegel, Marx, Freud, and other European social theorists. Far from invalidating the ideas of either African priests or European social theorists, an awareness of the situational and strategic nature of their statements helps us to understand those statements better and to apply them more thoughtfully to the comparative project.

What I record here is an ever-unfolding debate about value and ontology, a debate shaped by cross-cultural intercourse, interreligious rivalry, competing material interests, and social hierarchy. The lives and the sacred traditions of these priests fortify the case that understanding the idea of the fetish demands particular attention to the lived realities of not only West African but also central European history and society, as well as the overlaps between them. In this account, I have done my best to represent the opinions of my friends faithfully. I am, of course, the ultimate editor of the years-long dialogues that are condensed and paraphrased here, and I can claim no objectivity for my selections. However, Manmi Maude has read all of the passages concerning her or her temple, and I have carefully revised these passages according to her wishes. And a representative of Babá Murah has read all of the passages about him, translated them to him, and communicated his revisions through that representative. And I have incorporated them all, as well as David Font-Navarette's revision of his own contributions. However, I am responsible for any misunderstanding or misinterpretation appearing between these covers.

Each of the manifest gods and spirited things I have known in the Afro-Atlantic religions might usefully be analyzed as fetishes. Of course, I refer to these beings as "fetishes" not in the sense intended by Hegel, Marx, Freud,

and Böhme—as objects onto which people have *falsely* projected value, agency, or authenticity that *truly* belongs *elsewhere*. Rather, by "fetish," I mean to say that they are beings constructed and materially activated by humans, as all gods and spirited things are, that their value and agency result from a displacement of value and agency from other things or people, and that their legitimacy as concentrated repositories of value and agency is contested by the partisans of rival fetishes. In this sense, Afro-Atlantic gods and spirited things resemble multinational corporations, universities, nation-states, homelands, homes, and social theories. All of these institutions are networks of material things, plants, animals, and people animated by ideas asserted in the context of rival ideas about the value of and relationships among beings and things.

For example, consider the five US Supreme Court judges who, in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010), decided that corporations have the right to "freedom of speech," as if they were people. No less than people who believe that a river is an *orixá* and that a possession priest or cowrie-filled pot can become one, these judges experience the world through the sort of sign that I call a "fetish." In 2017 the parliament of New Zealand and, under its inspiration, a state high court in India conferred personhood upon certain rivers, making harms done to them punishable under the same terms as harm to people.[6] That such matters need to be addressed by legislatures and courts of law illustrates what is for me a defining feature of the fetish. What makes a fetish a fetish is not its falsity but the context of intercultural, interclass, intergender, or interpersonal controversy and contestation that leads some people to call the thing a fetish (in Hegel's, Marx's, or Freud's sense), while other people call it a true god, a true spirit, a true repository of value or agency, or an authentic metonym of some real force that matters.

Every fetish requires its participants to accept an order of reality and a shared conception of the desiderata made possible by it, as well as the legitimate means to pursue those desiderata, the problems that may result from ignoring this order of reality, and the possible means of resolving those problems. These collective convictions about the fetishized thing also entail a hierarchy of people competent to manage the social and material phenomena emanating from the spirited thing or network. Inattention to this hierarchy can forestall success or actively cause problems. Hence, a fetish is neither an idyll nor an inherent evil. The desiderata recognized and recommended by the fetish may or may not be fulfilled, and the fetish makes real a set of problems that may or may not be resolved. The fetish embodies and gives force to its makers' desires and goals at a specific time, place, and intersection of class interests, and it assembles communities not only around the pursuit of these desiderata and goals but also around opposition to their pursuit. There-

fore, the most reliable dividend of the fetish is not happiness but community and rivalry between communities. Such communities are therefore always tension-filled.

I explore the hypothesis that, like the material things that psychoanalysts call fetishes, both African gods and European social theories embody the revolutionary's, the patient's, or the worshipper's ambivalence—his or her simultaneous pursuit of relief from victimhood and identification with the victimizer. Concealed within Marx's and Freud's resistance to the oppression of people like them is also a subliminal desire to become the oppressor. It is always difficult for the long-term oppressed *not* to identify with their oppressors, *not* to wish for what the oppressor has, and, as Fanon ([1963] 1971) points out, *not* imitate and collaborate with the former oppressor. It is also difficult for the oppressor *not* to identify with the oppressed, *not* to wonder how the oppressed feel, *not* to wonder if the oppressed will turn the tables on the oppressor, and, under controlled circumstances, *not* to don the persona of the oppressed. In the context of an analysis of zombies and BDSM, this phenomenon will be a major theme of *Zombies and Black Leather* (Matory in preparation).

The only difference between the realness of Afro-Atlantic gods and that of US American corporations (or, for that matter, universities, nation-states, homelands, homes, and social theories) is that one can actually touch these gods. And I have done so on many occasions. I have talked to them at festivals and spiritual masses. And when they are nearby I sometimes feel a shiver or a lump in my throat. These physical sensations might well have other plausible explanations, but there is, in the end, no neutral, objective explanation of human experience that supersedes the perceiver's supraempirical biases or her culturally and historically specific assumptions about what is valuable, about what or who is in charge of our lives, and about who owes what to whom.

The gods of whom I speak are assembled, constructed, constituted, empowered, deposited, and interpreted in their worshippers and in their altars by groups of social and ritual experts. These gods then become the guarantors of communities and switching stations of the mutual obligations that people arrange among themselves and between themselves and the universe. Thus, the gods become powerful sources of orientation and control over the world as people experience it. To observe that corporations do the same (through papers of incorporation, contracts, logos, and theme songs) and that nation-states do the same (through constitutions, treaties, flags, and anthems) is not, for me, a criticism of corporations or nation-states. It is merely an ontological observation. But an element of their ontology as fetishes is that some people deny their validity.

My deconstruction of Marx's historical materialism and of Freud's psychoanalysis may look like such a denial. In fact, my deconstruction is a case of dramatic irony and of ambivalence. I internalize their hermeneutics even as I remove Marx and Freud from the pedestals on which exponents of theory typically place them. This removal is necessary because those pedestals are the "negro," the "savage," and our religions, which are forced to sit in the mud beneath Marx and Freud in order to make historical materialism and psychoanalysis look as though they have grown out of purely intellectual air.

In the end, though, the worshippers of the Afro-Atlantic gods are no more right or wrong than other people are about their equally useful but human-made reifications, such as the mind, charisma, conscience, or abstractly quantifiable time (that is, the kind that "waits for no man"). They are no more right or wrong than the people who believe in individuality, corporations, races, cultures, society, revolution, discourse, or habitus. And they are obviously nor more wrong than believers in Marx's labor theory of value or in the inevitability of "class struggle" as the engine of history. I will also argue that they are no more wrong than those who would follow Freud in fetishizing the white penis as an embodiment of citizenship or follow Marx in constructing a "negro slave" as a volitionless antitype of the rights-bearing white worker. Those who successfully build communities through the enactment of these central European constructions and those who successfully build communities through the worship of Afro-Atlantic gods simply create and experience the world through different fetishes. Sometimes, central Europeans and the worshippers of Afro-Atlantic gods fetishize the same material things—such as black bodies—from different social positions, making our bodies the most enduring and powerful of fetishes.

Though Hegel and his scions Marx and Freud anchored the likes of Babá Murah and his gods at the starting line of human consciousness and history, the *orixás* and the *orichas* now dance on Hegel's doorstep, in the Berlin temple of Babá Murah. I will argue that they bring full circle a circum-Atlantic historical and intellectual dialectic no less evident in Afro-Latin American altars and gods than in Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

Please note that I have chosen not to follow the usual English orthographic convention of capitalizing terms like "Labor Theory of Value" and "Master-Slave Dialectic" and have eschewed the usual hyphen in terms like "use-value," as such conventions imply the scriptural nature of Hegel's and Marx's writings and, much like the capitalization of "God," the uniqueness, preeminence, and personification of the forces that these terms reify. And my aim is to illuminate, rather than reproduce or even dismiss, these instances of fetishization.

On the Material Conditions of Theory

As a child of the European Enlightenment, I am both heir and victim to the premise that European "thinkers" create abstract, disembodied, and historically transcendent ideas, in contrast to Africans' ostensibly illogical gestures and bedazzled enthrallment to things. Since the Enlightenment, self-described white people have relied on the disparagement of Africans' sacred material things as proof of their own European dignity and as a fulcrum for the valorization of their own material things, ideas, and priorities. Yet, as a child of Africa, I am aware that African consecrated things embody ideas to the same degree that European social theories do. From this point of view, I can also see that European theories endorse contestable social priorities and dwell in things as much as African gods do. Hence, this book is as much about the entanglement of European ideas in material things and social relationships as it is about the entanglement of African sacred objects and social relationships in ideas.

For example, the "visual culture" (Morgan 2005) and the physical things in the environments of European theorists are no less important to understanding their cognition than anyone else's. Marx wrote about factories in the abstract. However, for him, the factory managed by his friend and benefactor, Friedrich Engels, was no mere abstraction. It was an assemblage of physical things entangled in a network of rules, schedules, supply chains, cash flows, commutes by workers and capitalists, buyers, and distributors. Marx's distillation of what mattered in the actor-network (Latour 2005) of industrial capitalism was part of a debate in which Marx could surely appreciate why the labor theory of value is not the only nondelusional way to explain capitalist exchange. Both Marx's millennial dream of prosperous self-employment for the white worker and the rented piano in his living room spoke volumes about his own bourgeois aspirations, especially when considered against the backdrop of his own chronic poverty. Marx's network of ideas, things, and conditions suggests as great a commitment to enjoying the material comforts of the bourgeoisie as to overthrowing bourgeois rule.

Until the day he died of cancer, it may not have dawned upon Freud that his twenty to thirty cigars a day were smoking him (see also Latour 2010: 55), but his biographers and the curators of his homes-turned-museums reveal an actor-network empire rich not only in ideas and books but also in intaglio rings, portable anthropomorphic antiquities, a rug-laden couch, an upright chair from which Freud invisibly listened to his supine patients, scores of photographic portraits from which (apparently by design) the cigar is seldom missing, and a trove of clubhouse rules for the day-to-day management of the psychoanalytical brotherhood. The artifactories of Marx's and Freud's ideas

and social relationships beg for an analysis, for which I offer some initial hypotheses here.

I will apply to European social theory the same questions that we Western scholars have long been accustomed to asking of African and other non-Western ways of thinking: How do the biographies, material interests, and material possessions of Marx and Freud help us to understand how they cognized and created their worlds? How do the perspectives of these influential central European social theorists correspond to their social positions and serve to enhance their social rank? I am no advocate of the vulgar Marxist position that people's social conditions inexorably determine their modes of thought. Rather, I hypothesize that, within any given cultural, social, and historical setting, any given symbolic or rhetorical representation of the world has the potential to honor and enrich some classes of people over others and that the representational choices that people make have an elective affinity (Weber [1904–5] 1958) with their social status in that setting. Bourdieu ([1984] 1988) calls this phenomenon the "struggle for classification."

It may be clear to many North American scholars that Marx and Freud help us to understand people and society better, but how might a recognition of these authors' unique social positionality amplify the lessons of historical materialism and psychoanalysis? Conversely, what blind spots do Marx's and Freud's latter-day followers perpetuate when they misrepresent the understandings and assertions of such European social theorists as transcendent, omniscient, panoramic, and socially neutral distillations of the truth about all societies, all social statuses, and all historical periods? My aim is to connect this central European biographical and historical archaeology of the "problem of the fetish" (Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988) with a comparative ethnography of the ongoing production, animation, and use of African- and African-diaspora spirited things—especially human-made gods—of the sort to which the term "fetish" has been applied since the run-up to the Enlightenment.

What Marx and Freud called "fetishism" is the displacement of agency and value from the site of its supposedly *real* production or existence onto something else. The direction attributed to this ostensibly wrongful displacement is a stipulation about which human relationships are more important than others and about where the attribution of agency and value should have stayed, with implications for what constitutes the proper conduct of human relationships, both of which are matters of opinion. Therefore, far from proving the users of the term right, the use of the term "fetish" reveals a social struggle over which relationships matter and how they should be conducted. Circum-Atlantic society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Marx and Freud were propounding their theories, was indeed a setting of debate among diverse parties with different stakes in the complex set of

relationships fueled by capitalism, empire, and racism. Much of that debate occurred through the production, exchange, and use of things. Among the foremost topics of this circum-Atlantic debate were the relative rights of European industrial workers and enslaved Africans, men and women, gentiles and Jews in the nation-state. Strange as it may seem, Africans and our animated things became major foci of European debates about the value of things and the agency of people in Europe. This book offers an Africanist, materialist, and psychoanalytical perspective on this European strangeness.

In the spirit of Dipesh Chakrabarty's project to "provincialize Europe" (2000), we would do well to remind ourselves that the European writings that we read after the fact as abstract theory emerged not from pure intellectual air or timeless truth but from cultural conventions, material conditions, biographical circumstances, and political rivalries. The democratizing ideological and military battles in which Europeans have long engaged over the internal constitution of their nation-states are often treated as though they took place in isolation from the enslavement, extermination, and displacement of Native Americans and Africans. Actions of the sort taken for granted in extra-European venues—such as the British Empire's torture and murder of Kikuyu people in the gulags of colonial Kenya and the German Empire's attempted extermination of the Hereros—tend to be described as uniquely shocking when they take place within Europe. Moreover, some of the discourses at the foundations of white men's democratizing aspirations have taken black, brown, and female subordination as a fait accompli, implicit in such tropes as "hysteria," which constructs women as the locus classicus of insanity, and George H. W. Bush's much-repeated phrase "voodoo economics," which casts Black people as exemplars of magical and demonstrably wrong thinking and acting. Rather than privileging Europe's social critics as the fount of definitive values and objective knowledge, I cast an Afro-Atlantic eye on Europe that recognizes our shared humanity and our shared experience of marginalization and oppression.

Yet, provincializing Europe also requires me to provincialize myself. Born in the US during the 1960s and the son of a psychologist, I am also a native to the intellectual traditions of psychoanalysis. As a PhD student during the 1980s, I could not but absorb the Marxian "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur 1973) that dominated US American critical theory during that era and continues to have a powerful impact on scholarly thought in the humanities and the humanistic social sciences. Yet, until 2014, when I spent my year in Berlin, my knowledge of the geography, architecture, economy, languages, ethnic identities, and conceptions of social inequality in Germanic Europe had been relatively abstract and heavily distorted by white American propaganda about western European "civilization" as the homeland of monolithic,

superhuman perfection, rather than a crossroads of a very human diversity, complexity, and perplexity.

I had previously traveled in Western Europe, including Austria, but on this occasion I rediscovered Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden specifically through a network of scholars interested in Africa and Latin America and with the intent to understand the roots of much influential European social theory in the taken-for-granted dialogue between Europe and the Black Atlantic. So my perspective on European social theory and its people is admittedly—and, I hope, profitably—Yorùbá-, Fòn-, and Kongo-centered.

Conclusion

I am not under the illusion that this book will easily move the true believers of historical materialism or psychoanalysis; in fact, it will surely rile them (or *you*, as the case may be). My aim here is not to provide a comprehensive account of the philosophical influences on Marx and Freud or to document the full and internally contradictory breadth of the movements that grew out of their work. Each of these traditions comprises a thicket of debates about what the founding father really meant, and there is no summary of anything they said that will not elicit a heated rejoinder about how much more subtle or complicated the truth of the scripture is. There is no reducing Marx or Freud to a single summary, much less a single explanation. Indeed, the highly cathected nature of debate among Marxists and Freudians about what the master *really* meant—and the attachment of these debates to divergent opinions about the right way to conduct our lives—are impeccable illustrations of fetishism. The best I can hope is that the reader will not allow debates over minutiae—however dear they may be to the partisan of one interpretive tradition or another—to obscure the main argument of parts I and II of the book or the foundation of the intercultural anthropology that follows: Marx and Freud were human beings exemplifying the same political or psychological impulses that they so insightfully identified in others; that those same impulses blinded them to some truths about themselves and others; and that the people they stigmatized similarly furnish useful insights into the impulses of Marx and Freud.

The multisited historical ethnography that I present and the numerous spirited things, or fetishes, that it descriptively and photographically documents suggest that the makers of these embodied spirits would return the criticism that European theory has thrown at them. With reference to a set of manufactured things and human-constructed gods from Nigeria, Benin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and the United States, I illustrate an Afro-Atlantic logic of the relationship among the cosmos, human

beings, goods, and gods that belies the stereotypes propagated by the usual European suppositions about the African fetish and denaturalizes the ostensible truths that European social theorists have constructed as true in contrast to it. I also offer some thoughts about the theory-articulating role of things—such as factories, coats, pianos, cigars, rings, Greco-Roman statues, upright chairs, and couches—in the praxis of Marx and Freud. Here I turn the tables on European theory and highlight what is peculiar, material, biographical, perspectival, and religiously mist-enveloped in these ostensibly crystalline and universalist social theories.

At the same time, I offer evidence for the hypothesis that the altars of the Afro-Atlantic religions—and the numerous commodities they contain—reflect the genesis of these religions, as well, in the intercultural commercial zone of the Guinea Coast, where Portuguese and Dutch merchants inaugurated the concept of the fetish as we know it today. Guinea-Coast religions and their diasporic counterparts embody and transform the interests of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Guinea Coast merchant-monarchs and priests, offering a social and commercial response to Atlantic capitalism just as historically specific, class specific, and materially interested as the social theories of Marx and Freud. Marx, Freud, and the gods Black people make not only illuminate each other's conceptual premises but also share rhizomatic roots in the Atlantic exchange.

Part Summaries

Part I argues that Marx's labor theory of value is no more empirically demonstrable than the theories that it critiques and that it is just as socially positioned in the perspective it articulates. By comparison with the ostensible incompetence of the "negro slave" and the supposedly minimal worth of his or her product, Marx affirms the collective agency of all European wage workers, the value of their product, and, by proxy, Marx's own worthiness of enfranchisement despite his ethnicity and downward class mobility.

Part II describes how Freud's insecurities about his race and his sexual orientation shaped psychoanalysis and inspired divinations about the human personality that uncannily resemble underdeveloped versions of the Afro-Atlantic religions. This argument employs the shared insights of psychoanalysis and the Afro-Atlantic religions to highlight the ambivalent nature of the empowered things at the core of the social organizations constituted by both psychoanalysis and the Afro-Atlantic religions.

Part III discusses the conceptions of value and agency embodied in the human-made gods of the Afro-Atlantic religions and the class interests they

encode—interests very different from but no less contextually reasonable than those advocated by Hegel, Marx, and Freud.

In the end, what makes the conversation among Marx, Freud, and the Afro-Atlantic priests so interesting is that each invests value and agency in material things—indeed, often the same things—and that their investment of contrasting degrees of value and contrasting types of agency in these things is precisely what makes those things powerful, enduring, and electric in their effects on the communities for which they are touchstones.

The argument of *The Fetish Revisited* might be summarized in four main points.

First, theory is not a disembodied, universal truth but a creature dialectically related to the social environment, material surroundings, and material interests of the theorists.

Second, the term "fetishism" is a useful way to show the competitive and strategic nature of meaning making in the construction of European social theories, Afro-Atlantic gods, and numerous other socially effective stipulations about where value lies and who owes what to whom.

Third, like the most powerful and spectacular of African "fetishes," the most powerful and spectacular European social theories embody not only the social ambiguity but also the political and emotional ambivalence of their creators. Clearly *subordinate* parties find in the fetish a reminder of their humiliation and a promise of power through identification with the dominant. Surprisingly, some clearly *dominant* parties find in the fetish both a reminder of their power and the desirable promise of relief from responsibility for that power (Matory in preparation). It is my hypothesis that socially ambiguous people—such as parvenus, middle classes, racially ambiguous people, ambitious or high-status members of subordinated races, and subordinated members of high-status races—have the greatest stake in contemplating and resolving the structural oppositions and conflicting values embedded in the fetish. Off-white whites like Marx and Freud and coastal African merchant-monarchs are prime exemplars of this phenomenon. These cases also help to explain the irony that one country—Germany—is the source of both cultural relativism and Europe's most radically chauvinist nationalism.

Fourth, in the making of theories and of gods, the assignment of value and agency to one party regularly entails the devaluation and the zombification of (that is, the denial of agency to) other parties. For this reason, populations that are vulnerable to oppression are often highly articulate in trumpeting the even-greater inferiority of populations that they can conceivably place below themselves in the social hierarchy.

NOTES

Preface

1 See, for example, Mollena Williams, http://risk-show.com/podcast/slave.
2 Sacred Arts of the Black Atlantic, http://sacredart.caaar.duke.edu/.
3 The poetic phrase "spirited things" is also the title of a book edited by Paul C. Johnson, *Spirited Things: The Work of "Possession" in the Afro-Atlantic Religions* (2014). With a somewhat different intention, I use the term to describe physical things that have through ritual been animated with sacred value or humanlike agency.

Introduction

1 This sense of inferiority may have been far stronger among the forebears of today's Germany than among the German speakers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire because the latter had an empire whose official language was German (Dr. Richard Kuba, personal communication, November 4–5, 2014).
2 This insight emerged from a videotaped dialogue between Dr. Michael Barrett (curator for Africa, Ethnographic Museum, Stockholm) and me on September 17, 2014.
3 Dr. Richard Kuba warns that this liberal tradition of German ethnology did not enjoy universal popularity in Germany. It did not represent all classes or regions of the nineteenth-century German-speaking world. Nor did it represent the entire nineteenth-century German-speaking academy. More obviously, such liberalism did not remain typical of German ethnology in the twentieth century. Indeed, in the twentieth century, with respect to their degree of liberalism, German ethnology, on the one hand, and British and French ethnology, on the other, seem to have reversed positions (personal communication, November 4–5, 2014). I am also grateful to Professor Hans Peter Hahn (personal communication, November 4–5, 2014) for his insights about Leo Frobenius and German intellectual history.
4 For example, Böhme ([2006] 2014: 167, 178) shows that Marx was considerably harsher in his condemnation of the alleged African prototypes of "fetishism" than were most of his German-speaking predecessors and contemporaries such as Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach, Max Müller, and Adolf Bastian, not to mention the French philosopher Auguste Comte.
5 For examples of Freud's frequent use of Africa as a metaphor of repressed European sexuality, see, for example, Gilman (1992: 169) and Kramer (1996: 42n1).

6 See Betsy Blumenthal (2017), "New Zealand and India Have Rivers That Are Now Legally Living Entities," *Conde Nast Traveler*, March 29, www.cntraveler.com/story/new-zealands-whanganui-river-is-now-legally-a-human-being.

Chapter 1. The Afro-Atlantic Context

1 The parade of white male superheroes in US American toys, comics, television series, and films appears to reveal ordinary white males' public aspiration to autonomy, self-sufficiency, efficiency, and leadership. But the usually outlandish costumes and masks of such superheroes seem to dramatize the same people's worry that, even when they perform such a posture, it is a masquerade repressing the knowledge of their own very human fallibility and mediocrity, as well as an exhausting expectation even to try to live up to. Consider also George Orwell's essay, "Shooting an Elephant" (1936), in which a white police officer in the British colony of Burma makes a terrible mistake because he fears having his indecision and weakness laughed at by the brown people he had been assigned to police. The private episodes of surrender provided by BDSM must be a profound relief to the many white men who assume the role of the slave in BDSM dungeons and in M/s relationships. Individually, they are no stronger than the rest of us. In fact, they are probably a little weaker, given the relative safely of their circumstances and their overreliance on the fiction of their superiority and the expectation of their immunity to abjection and injustice. Their threshold for disappointment and cracking is lower than for most of the rest of us. The accelerating epidemic of mass shootings by lone white boys and men in the United States provides evidence of this point. It is a sign of decency and humanity that, instead, they sometimes wish deeply to submit.
2 This inference did not cause him to disavow Africans' need or right to be free. Nor did he disavow his conviction that subjection is a necessary stage in the advance toward freedom. Rather, he simply concluded that the emancipation of enslaved Africans should be gradual.

Chapter 2. The "Negro Slave" in Marx's Labor Theory of Value

1 The comparable Brazilian Portuguese phrase is *trabalhando como negros*. Wyatt MacGaffey tells me that this phrase was also common in England during the 1930s (personal communication, spring 2016).
2 This quote appears on the back cover of the 1990 Penguin edition of *Capital*, vol. 1.
3 Defenders and proponents of Marx's message tend to describe his model as an "immanent critique" of capitalism—a critique of capitalism in its own, emic terms (see, e.g., Postone 1993: 21). However, Marx defines value in supraempirical and ways and in expressly spiritual terms that do not originate in the thinking of any workers or capitalists I know. He also attributes an inexorable and nonhuman agency to the historical unfolding of capitalism itself. Like a religious person, Marx continually repairs his vision of capitalism, its fundamental structure, and its inevitable trajec-