

12-1-2019

## Review – Tamura Lomax, *Jezebel Unhinged: Loosing the Black Female Body in Religion & Culture*

SimonMary Asese Ahiokhai  
*University of Portland*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ahiokhai, SimonMary Asese (2019) "Review – Tamura Lomax, *Jezebel Unhinged: Loosing the Black Female Body in Religion & Culture*," *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*: Vol. 12, Article 15.

Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts/vol12/iss1/15>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium* by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu), [ecommons@udayton.edu](mailto:ecommons@udayton.edu).

***Jezebel Unhinged: Loosing the Black Female Body in Religion & Culture.* Tamura Lomax. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018. Xx, 262 pp. \$25.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781478001072.**

Few works have been written showcasing a detailed analysis of the origins and ways violence done to female bodies in North American societies since the time of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade play out in their historical continuum. In this work, Tamura Lomax presents the complex narratives surrounding the usage of the Jezebel trope as a figure of moral depravity both in White culture and in the Black Church and culture. The beauty of this work is that it presents a polyphonic analysis of the strategies and tools used by the different groups in America's social and religious histories to define and ascribe a subjugated identity to African American women. The Cartesian dualistic framework that holds Western thought captive is called out for what it is – a manipulative tool that instantiates the privileges of whiteness, maleness, wealth, and heteronormativity.

No one interested in serious scholarship on African American Studies, black diaspora, and gender and sexuality from the context of black female bodies can afford not to engage this work. The author has made a bold claim by articulating a different path for presenting insights on identity markers and constructions in the black world, be it in the domains of the profane or the sacred.

Lomax does not make a hasty conclusion that many deconstructionist scholars are fond of doing by allotting blames and simplifying what is not simple in any shape or form. She showcases how the negative imagery of the Jezebel trope can and does serve as a mimetic response to oppression by Black women in America. That, which is intended to subjugate becomes the very source of survival and liberation. By doing this, Lomax situates the discourse at the heart of the religious and the existential. Religion, which was used to manipulate an obedient response from the enslaved by the White enslaver, becomes the source for the articulation of a black identity in a foreign land, an identity whose focus is fixed on freedom.

This work challenges not only the Black Church to be prophetic and to look inwards to see how it appropriates and represents rituals and narratives of oppression, it calls also to task those within the black community who have offered dissenting perspectives to the exclusionary

attitudes of the Black Church and community for not doing enough to be truly inclusive in their response to the systems of exclusion, notable among these are Womanist theologians and black feminist scholars. As she notes, "... womanists' accent on black women's texts places prominence on written texts by black women as well as representational texts produced by white culture such as black female stereotypes. Yet black women and girls simultaneously live outside of texts. Though they are textualized and often texts themselves, they are living, breathing, and walking subjects with complex lives, much of which has yet to be recorded" (89).

A notable strength of this work is that it articulates a systematic approach for deconstructing exclusionary narratives and reconstructing those that embody wholeness. The author does this by calling attention to what can be learned from the field of "black feminist religious thought, and black feminist religio-cultural criticism" (101). In her words, "this work requires examining and disrupting communicative signals, encodings, and ideologies in our everyday language while keeping it real (and critical) about hidden values" 106).

Finally, this work showcases a systematic interdisciplinary study of the intersectionality between the racialized American society and the multiple responses to this larger framework by black pop culture, the Black Church, black socio-cultural and religious critical responses (feminists and womanists), and the current emerging voices from the margins, those who represent in their very being ultimate alterity – members of the black LGBTQ+ community. Lomax concludes that the Black Church is both beautiful and sick (205). To address this ailment that instantiates narratives of erasure, Lomax offers five concrete interventions that the Black Church ought to appropriate as it seeks to birth-forth new narratives of inclusion and wholeness. In her words, "... the Black Church must imagine a new picture. One that is truth-telling, messy, gray, and sometimes ugly. One that is inclusive and plural. One that centers on a radical black love ethic" (209).

SimonMary Asese Ahiokhai, Ph.D.  
University of Portland