

NATHANAEL J. HOMEWOOD. *SEDUCTIVE SPIRITS: DELIVERANCE, DEMONS, AND SEXUAL WORLDMAKING IN GHANAIAN PENTECOSTALISM.* STANFORD: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2024. 292 P. ISBN: 9781503638068

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Seductive spirits is the result of fieldwork Nathanael J. Homewood carried out between 2015 and 2016 in Ghanaian Pentecostal congregations in the greater Accra area. His work aims to investigate the imaginaries these congregations construct around sex with demons. It is a detailed exploration of what Homewood terms the *pneumoerotic*, ‘sexual relationships between bodies and spirits’ (69), and its radically transgressive implications for how, even outside the immediate research context, we may begin to think through the binaries and boundaries and modernity and coloniality, and past the limitations of our five senses as we normally understand them.

After giving context for Ghanaian Pentecostalism—its historical development, influence from local cosmologies, and entanglements with Western evangelical influence—Homewood situates contemporary attitudes towards spirits and sexuality within a broader cultural matrix. He illustrates how beliefs about sex with demons are not simply theological abstractions but are shaped by and reflected in popular Ghanaian films and published testimonies. These media forms, saturated with dramatised scenes of demonic seduction and possession, reinforce and circulate spiritual anxieties, especially around sexuality, gender, and bodily boundaries. Demonology, in this context, is not confined to the pulpit; it is a popular vernacular of moral and metaphysical crises.

With this densely layered background established, *Seductive spirits* unfolds across six thematically organised chapters that trace the permutations of sex with demons as a spiritual and phenomenological experience. Focussing on various kinds of deliverance ‘scenes’, Homewood explores among other things how spirits seduce or violate humans through masturbation, how spiritual marriages blur the line between dream and waking life, and how demonic agents infiltrate the body’s orifices—sometimes transmitted through intimate contact, sonically, and through unwitting contracts made with the demonic. Chapter six, ‘Serpentine scenes’, dwells on the idea of metamorphosis into animals, on the parts of the demons, the possessed, as well as some of the prophets, a recurring motif in Pentecostal deliverance that indexes anxieties about animality, desire, and human sovereignty.

The response to demons in Pentecostal churches is to exorcise them. The process of exorcism in these circumstances centres on the pastor calling attention to the demon, naming them and describing their characteristics, as well as enumerating in lurid detail, or inducing the possessed to enumerate the kind of sex acts that they engender. In the explicit

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descriptions of sex with demons, and in the deliverance of people from these kinds of demons, there is a blurring of the boundaries between the private and the public, the earthly and the spiritual, the material and the imaginary. But Homewood argues that the docility that follows exorcism is not *really* the point; the docile body is usually swiftly moved on from and attention given to another site of activity or resistance. The point would seem rather to be the voyeuristic detailing and acting out of demonic sex, the often violent intervention of the pastor which comes about from ‘tarrying’ on the subject (91).

Homewood cannot always perceive what his research subjects seem to be experiencing. As a self-reflexive outsider, he does not possess what he calls ‘*demonologeyes*’—an evocative if somewhat clunky coinage he leans upon to try to imagine what the prophets and congregants may be perceiving when they encounter demons in their various manifestations. *Demonologeyes* describes the unique ‘haptic visionary sense at the very core of deliverance’ (181). The point is that while Pentecostal practices may appear to be ocular-centric, they in fact persuade us to rethink sight itself—participating fully in the communal drama that deliverance services entail seeing the unseen. More broadly, Homewood argues that sex with demons encourages us to rethink and reimagine our relationship to the senses.

Homewood argues that to build a hermeneutics out of this reimagining: ‘an intense interdisciplinarity was required [...] queer theory, sense studies, animal studies, philosophy, theology, and Black studies are just some of the fields utilized to better understand the theoretical richness of Pentecostalism’ (12). The ethnography, which takes the sensual extremely seriously, unfolds with thick description bolstered by interpretation informed by these various fields.

For one example out of several, Homewood appears to lean on a conception of queerness as being inherently subversive. He recounts one case, which is so startling in its violence that Homewood expresses anxiety over his ‘embodied complicity’ (145) as a passive participant-observer, of a woman outed as a lesbian against her will during a deliverance service (she is said to be possessed by the ‘spirit of lesbianism’). She is physically assaulted in a bid to make her submit. She however never stops struggling and resists deliverance to the very end. Finally, out of exhaustion (the attempt at deliverance takes two hours, out of a service which had already gone on for half a day), the exorcism is abandoned without fanfare, and proceedings move on—with her body still moving, ignored. The subject has not in fact been made docile. She tells Homewood afterwards that she does not feel that she needs to be delivered of lesbianism; she had believed she was to be delivered of some other spirit, and affirms that the exorcism did not work. She remains transgressive, even while maintaining a level of belief in deliverance. And indeed, prior to her verbal dissent, her body is one example among others of ‘bodies that refuse docility, bodies not seduced by Pentecostal noisemaking but instead by a choreosonic sense that constructs a clamoring resistance toward exclusionary Pentecostal sexual mores’ (152). By ‘noisemaking’, Homewood literally means the ritualised deliberate making of noise that is the norm in Pentecostal services.

Seductive spirits does not rely on queer theory alone or even majorly; but in the inherent queerness of sex with demons, it could be said to be generally focussed on subversion. For Pentecostal practices and ideas which may seem to uphold racist, demonising stereotypes about African sexuality and spirituality, Homewood finds them, despite themselves, valuable for how tarrying with them, to borrow his word, may prove ironically decolonial. ‘Cavorting with demons is decolonial in that it unveils the religio-sexual foundations of modernity/coloniality, delinks sexuality from binaries, good and evil, hetero- and homo, and constructs new sexual worlds’ (209).

Homewood’s book will naturally be of use to anyone interested in the unique permutations of postcolonial spirituality and religion; it is also of great benefit to anyone

concerned with the various fields from which it draws. It is particularly relevant, I believe, to the anthropology of experience, for how it stretches beyond the profane realm of the senses. Regrettably we do not get much insight into the socio-economic origins of the research subjects, and the congregations often seem homogeneously blurred into a kind of Greek chorus. It could also be argued that in Homewood's pluriversal attempt to see through Pentecostal eyes, as it were, he does not engage with what *really* may be happening in these psychologically intense and coercive environments, in case neither exorcisms nor sex with demons are not actually happening, and how believers may indeed be acting out trauma or desperation or indoctrination.

But perhaps I am imposing my own ideas about what might be psychologically *real*. All the same, with Homewood's self-awareness as an ethnographer, and his openness to new experience without imposing judgement, *Seductive spirits* stands as a groundbreaking, dramatically and captivantly written, intelligent account, which has the good humour to consider seriously and in detail the absurdities and injustices recounted without becoming unduly voyeuristic.

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