

BOOK REVIEW

HOMEWOOD, Nathanael. *Seductive Spirits: Deliverance, Demons, and Sexual Worldmaking in Ghanaian Pentecostalism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024. 292 pp. Paperback. ISBN 9781503638068. \$30.

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It is no longer news that Pentecostalism is Africa's fastest growing expressions of Christianity and as foremost scholars of African Pentecostalism such as Ogbu Kalu, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, and Nimi Wariboko have argued, the unique elements of their expression should be considered on their own right. In *Seductive Spirits: Deliverance, Demons, and Sexual Worldmaking in Ghanaian Pentecostalism*, Nathanael Homewood has sought to do so by engaging a subject of peculiar interest in Africa's expression of Pentecostalism; the business of emancipating human bodies from the incursion of sex demons. Based on prolonged ethnographic research focused on four major Pentecostal prophets in Ghana's capital, Accra, Homewood provides an account of 'deliverance' among Ghanaian Pentecostals that broadens the scope of contemporary discourse in African Pentecostalism. His etic approach and anthropological lens serve to skillfully weave through thick descriptions and engage the physicality and spirituality of human-demon interaction. Simply put, Homewood's account is highly erotic and deeply sensory. It invokes the sonic, ocular, and tactile senses to paint a lucid and vivid, yet intellectually stimulating account of human bodies and demons and the banishment of demons from human bodies.

Homewood's *Seductive Spirits* offers several important interventions in relation to Ghanaian Pentecostalism broadly speaking but more specifically to sex-related deliverances and demonology. Within the six chapters of the book, Homewood skilfully interrogates the complex ritual of deliverance from several sexual categories of sex with demons, particularly masturbation, spiritual spouses, homosexuality, and sexual encounters with animals. The author proposes that encompassing spiritual entanglements on display, these deeply embodied interactions are equally contexts of renegotiating sex and sexuality. A formative claim in this text is that sexual experiences with demons are not peripheral or marginal in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Rather, they are integral to the belief and practice of Ghanaian Pentecostalism and central in understanding deliverance scenes and *mise en scene* within these congregations. As such, deliverance ministries, such as the ones considered in this text are vital spiritual architectures of transformation and meaning making with immense social significance. Homewood introduces the concept of *pneumo-erotic* as a useful hermeneutical tool for analyzing these sexual relationships between demonic spirits and human bodies. Based on this

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theoretical framework, Homewood skilfully weaves through thick descriptions of deliverance scenes to unpack ambiguities and complexities which defy traditional and conventional understanding of human and demonic sexual relationships and normative conceptions of sex, sexuality, and the human body.

Homewood sets the stage for his discussion by providing an important historical backdrop to contemporary practices of ‘tarrying with demons’ in deliverance ministries. He claims that Christian missionary’s response to indigenous Ghanaian spiritual cosmos birthed a Manichean dualism between indigenous spirits and Christianity and resulting in these exorcistic sites and services across the Ghanaian Christian landscape but most prominently in Pentecostal churches. In ‘tarrying with demons’, deliverance ministries manage to construct life-worlds and demonological cosmos that simultaneously takes both the Christian Holy Spirit and indigenous spirits seriously. For example, he argues that the West African deity, Mami Wata, has been sexualized in these settings and is by far the most common sexual spirit in Ghana. In addition to indigenous worldviews, Homewood makes the important affirmation that deliverance ministries in Ghanaian Pentecostalism is heavily influenced by Western inferences and the Bible. The incursion of Western Pentecostal ideologies on demonology through films, books, and the testaments of Pentecostal preachers have equally introduced problematic sexual structures and conceptions of the realm of the demonic steeped in modernity and coloniality. As such, Homewood’s primary intervention lies in the assertion that the sexual worlds enacted between demons and human bodies and performed in exorcists’ deliverances are not only defined by frameworks of modernity/coloniality but also produce decolonial taxonomies of defiant resistance against those incursions.

Homewood’s decolonial submission suggests that the heavily embodied experiences of Ghanaian Pentecostal demonological cosmos and war on demonic spirits challenges conventional understanding of sex and sexual identity and the binaries between good and evil. Deliverance services move beyond sites of demonic banishment to become scenes of sexual rebellion where alternative sexual worlds that transcend traditional boundaries and categorizations are conjured. Homewood argues that ‘tarrying with sex’ in such scenes, where sexual experiences are performed with extravagant, fluid and creative disposition, reveals a forceful defiance of cis-heteronormativity imposed by coloniality/modernity, resulting in expansive sexual identities. I find Homewood’s challenge of hegemonic signification and instrumentalization of ‘demonization’, which was primarily framed as a colonial tool aimed to marginalize African bodies and identities, to be especially useful in this analysis. Homewood’s conceptualization of deliverance scenes and human bodies/demon-sex relations therefore suggests a decolonial counter-signification which empowers African bodies to subvert and reframe demonization and colonial renditions of normative sexuality.

In *Seductive Spirits*, Homewood truly broadens and extends Wariboko’s supposition that Pentecostals find meaning in maintaining ambiguity between the holy and the anti-holy. Sex with demons in deliverance ministries, as described by Homewood in great detail, is deeply evocative and conjures an almost un-holy sight. Yet, beyond the fierce sensory appeal with redolent sights, fluids, and almost painful groans, lies pleasure, intense pleasure even. As a true ethnographer, Homewood takes his positionality as a white researcher seriously including naming his firm desire to avoid any tendency towards a racializing ethnopornographic gaze. While it can be said that his analysis may truly help to clarify a Western gaze and shortsightedness towards Ghanaian Pentecostal’s embodied and religious ambiguity by suggesting an embedded sexual manifestation and framework, does this sexual framework truly explain to a Ghanaian Pentecostal their experience of this Afrocentric religious and embodied ambiguity? In other words, I am curious if casting a critical indigenous epistemic lens on Homewood’s argument and conclusion would reveal an assent or dissent, and should we read every demonic exorcism in this light?

In *Seductive Spirits*, Homewood offers narratives that are daringly bold, deeply sensual, and almost off-putting. Yet, if the reader tarries with Homewood long enough, they reveal creative, intellectually stimulating, and thought-provoking ideas he has so articulately theorized. Homewood leads the way in showing how to meddle between theory and data succinctly and inventively to produce boundary pushing thesis and meta-narratives. One thing is certain: the emancipation of demons from human bodies is a messy business, and Homewood has not only displayed a thorough understanding of how messy it can get, but also what generative meanings are constructed out of the chaos. Scholars of African Pentecostalism and pneumatology, African Christianity, and world Christianity will find tarrying with the pages of this provocative piece truly worthwhile.