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“Fieldworking” Deliverance Rituals in a Liberian Pentecostal Ministry: The Surprising Benefits of Embracing your “Otherness” While Taking Part in Religious Performance

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Abstract

This paper describes fieldwork attempts to understand perceptions of the spirit world in one Liberian Pentecostal ministry, and the limitations in fully understanding and collecting data for such an ambiguous topic, when relying only on interviews and observations. Using only these methods, I was faced with a number of seeming contradictions between teachings and practices. By remaining flexible in my fieldwork methods, I found that taking advantage of my “otherness” – my status as a non-born-again Christian – rather than being an obstacle to gaining access, was actually very useful, especially when I was surprisingly invited to be the subject of one of the ministry’s deliverance rituals. The reasons that I was allowed to take part in the performance and the performance itself gave me valuable data that could not have been acquired through any of my own questions or observations.

Keywords: Christianity; deliverance; fieldwork; Liberia; Pentecostalism; performance.

Introduction

Imagine being in the field and asking somebody the following question:

Can you explain to me everything you know about the spirit world, specifically demons and deliverance, where that fits into the battle between good and evil, and how that affects the way you think and act in day to day life? And to what extent everything you're telling me to be taken literally?

These are the impossible-to-ask questions that I wanted answers to, and this paper describes the way I uncovered some answers using an adaptable methodology of "winging it."

In September 2007 I began nearly ten months of fieldwork for my PhD Thesis, then-titled "Pentecostalism, Evil and Social Change in Post-Conflict Monrovia, Liberia." A substantial part of my research question involved popular conceptions and socio-political implications of the "spiritual battle between good and evil" in Pentecostal churches. Before entering the field, the topic seemed so ambiguous that I decided to let much of my methodology adapt depending on what I encountered. This decision proved especially beneficial when it came to Pentecostal rituals of deliverance from evil spirits and my (surprising) role in them, which is the topic of this paper.

I will discuss one of the ministries that I was researching, to describe four situations, or strategies, through which I gained information about deliverance and, more broadly, "conceptions of the spirit world." Each situation gave me more knowledge, but also exposed me to apparent contradictions between teachings and practice. As I will show, it was my eventual inclusion into a performance of deliverance, which according to the teachings was dangerous for the community and myself, that alleviated much of my confusion and provided key data to support my hypotheses about how the spirit world is perceived in this Pentecostal ministry. In order to most effectively "fieldwork" the religion, then, I adapted my methodology so that I embraced my "otherness," instead of futilely trying to make it less obvious, and from that I gained invaluable insights into this pervasive but elusive "spirit world" that I'd read so much about.

Before the Field

The Debate I Was Entering Into

Before describing each of these situations, a brief background of Pentecostal churches, and the debate which I intended to address in my PhD thesis, is necessary. Pentecostal churches are most basically the types of churches that believe in the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in everyday life, including the

possibility of having spiritual gifts such as tongues, prophecy, healing and deliverance (also known as exorcism). There is no single institutional or theological base for Pentecostalism, and these churches tend to be quite varied throughout the world, so generalizations are dangerous and often misleading (Anderson, 2004; 2006b). However, there are a number of recurring emphases which enable cross-cultural comparisons. Evil is one of these recurring emphases; specifically, the discourses about its nature, and the most effective actions for combating it (see for example Meyer, 1999; Maxwell, 1998; Anderson, 2004; 2006a: 233–34; Corten and Marshall-Fratani, 2001).

One specific Pentecostal activity during which perceptions of evil are most apparent is deliverance. Generally, this is the act by which an individual is able to get rid of one or more demons that are negatively affecting his or her life, using the power of the Holy Spirit. This act is situated firmly within a dualistic cosmological framework of good (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, born-again Christians) versus evil (Satan, demons, witchcraft, all non-born-again Christians), which is thought to be the ultimate root of many, if not all, physical events. In practice, the details can vary greatly depending on the church under consideration (see for example Gifford, 1998: 99; Maxwell, 2006: 202–207; Van Dijk, 1997; 2001; Cox, 1994).

Understanding the Spirit World

Ellis and Ter Haar write, "In African religious traditions, the representation of spirits as real beings emphasizes the personal rather than the metaphorical aspect of relationships between the visible and the invisible worlds...a power within the reach of all" (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: 52). Few scholars of Pentecostalism would argue that the spirit world is not an indispensable factor of the Pentecostal religious imagination. However, the particular implications of this preoccupation with the spirit world can be assessed from two angles. From one angle, we can consider Pentecostal ideals that are based upon understandings of the spirit world, and how those ideals will influence, encourage or consolidate thoughts and actions. David Martin in particular approaches the matter from this angle, arguing that Pentecostal ideals and worldviews have major implications in terms of providing impetus or encouragement for the reform of existing norms and values. He imagines the Pentecostal born-again conversion to imply a major personal transformation *because* this is what the Pentecostal worldview envisions. Stephen Ellis, writing about religious beliefs in Liberia generally, argues that one can explain the way the seemingly bizarre parts of the recent civil war played out as a reflection of the popular perception that the spiritual realm was unregulated and imbalanced on the side of evil, and makes a passing suggestion that Pentecostal churches might be considered

to be effectively “reorganizing” the spirit world, in the minds of the believers, by enabling believers to have a relationship with an all-powerful and benevolent God to fight the evils around them (Ellis, 1999: 268–69). Ellis and Ter Haar similarly see that “the dualistic vision of good versus evil is a helpful idiom through which moral confusion subsides and enables religious legitimacy” (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: 148–49). The common assumption of such arguments is that is the spiritual worldview that will affect this-worldly events.

Conversely, it might be that this-worldly realities determine Pentecostal world-views, an angle fewer scholars use when assessing the role of Pentecostalism. In approaching the debate from this angle, it is most helpful to consider Horton’s description of African religion as based upon “explanation, prediction and control of space-time events” (Horton, 1993). Accepting this definition enables us to treat Pentecostalism as another form of African religiosity that will adapt in whatever way it needs to in order to fulfil these practical “this-worldly” functions. Thus the Pentecostal spiritual worldview must also be situated within an understanding of indigenous spiritual worldviews that vary in different times and places, and the worldview itself is dependant upon those this-worldly realities.

It is thus still unclear what the Pentecostal spiritual worldview *does* in this world or, conversely, what this world *does* to the Pentecostal spiritual worldview. This is a difficult thing to measure; Paul Gifford is correct when he argues that Ellis and Ter Haar have not proven that “politics in Africa is being reordered in any way by the demonology in question, nor shown what might count as evidence for this claim and how we might assess it” (Gifford, 2004: 189–90, 196). Gifford’s question is critical; thus I was somewhat at a loss as to how I would go about “fieldworking” the hidden but pervasive spirit world in Liberia, and then to enter into the debate surrounding its existence and significance.

The Original Methodological Approach

As a student of the Study of Religions, I have a certain amount of methodological freedom. Such flexibility can be very useful, but it is not without criticism (Hackett, 2001). The debate I was entering was addressed by a variety of disciplines, as most scholars of religion are used to. So, before entering the field, instead of developing a formal methodological framework, I decided on my basic approach, some possibilities I might consider depending on what I encountered, and left the rest to be determined. My basic approach was to be a methodologically agnostic (Smart, 1973) observer as participant, that I would be doing interviews, and I knew that I would make them as open-ended as possible, so as to not “lead” my informants to answer questions as I expected them to; I planned on focusing on three churches as

case-studies, but also to attend other Christian events and churches when I had the time, to gauge my cases studies in relation to the Christian scene generally.

A major issue I was concerned about before entering the field was my non-Pentecostal and non-born-again identity, especially because I knew I would be asked the question, “Are you born again?” or “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour?” or some variety of it, and that I wanted to be completely honest and ethical with my research. So, I planned on responding to such a question by saying “Well, it depends how you look at it...” and highlighting that I was a water-baptized Christian, Episcopalian to be specific, and in the past was a member of a charismatic Episcopalian church, all true statements, but that I had never been “baptized in the spirit,” the Pentecostal mark for a true born-again Christian. I would not volunteer the information that I did not believe in speaking in tongues, deliverance and the end-times, but if asked, I would answer truthfully. I also would not volunteer details about my personal life which most Pentecostals might not approve of, but if was asked specifically about it (and the question wasn’t inappropriate), I would be honest. Ethically, of course, I intended to make it as clear as possible that I was visiting their church for fieldwork purposes; not to worship, be converted, or to help them in any way. Because of all of this, I was worried that I would be considered such an outsider that I would be unable to gain access to the information I wanted. I knew I would probably be recognized as the non-born-again and non-willing-to-convert “other” among this group, but my aim was to make that as little obvious as possible. I wasn’t entirely sure how this would play out, or how I would address any problems should I be excluded from researching certain aspects of the churches because of my identity, or if my research on the church would be affected because of the churches’ attempts to convert me, but like all other things, I figured I best just go and see what happened.

Entering the Field – How I Tried to Learn about Deliverance

Gaining Access

This paper will focus on one Liberian Pentecostal Ministry, which I will refer to as CEM. The leaders of the ministry were very open to my researching them; the President, founder and head pastor, Reverend D, studied sociology at the University of Liberia and understood quite well what that I would be visiting his church purely for qualitative research purposes. It was two weeks before anybody in the church asked about my Christian status, to which I responded as planned. Nobody seemed troubled by this although they did frequently tell me that they were praying for me

to be born again and to grow spiritually, and I was occasionally the subject of group prayers during services.

My fieldwork method with CEM evolved as I went along, beginning with an approach to simply be friendly, respectful, eager to listen and make an effort to take part in any activity or service that they were having. This seemed to work, as I was immediately included in all of the events that the church was holding, and after two months they made me a member of the crusade Secretariat, whose job was, among other things, to count offering money at large events. I also worked in the office whenever they needed me, transcribing people's testimonies, folding envelopes, and producing the ministry's first newsletter. For a few weeks I played guitar in church band practices. I went with them on city-wide evangelizing rallies, and they included me in all the events they were holding, both inside and outside Monrovia, encouraging me to sing, dance, pray and even be a guest speaker at their services to talk about, "whatever is important to say." When a service wasn't going on, I would spend my time with the church women, cooking food, singing, gossiping and watching Nigerian films, or with the church men, usually watching American Christian DVDs or just chatting about Liberia and the church. With such access, I was gaining a huge amount of information through my observations, interviews, informal discussions and overheard conversations. I was effectively an active member of the church, but I was lacking the most important quality for what they considered to be a true Christian: I was not born-again. I repeatedly made my role clear, and whenever somebody would try to get me to "give my life to Christ," I would explain that this was not the reason I was visiting the church. While I was an active member, I explained, this was simply so that I could learn as much as possible. I was always very frank about my opinions about their ideas and practices – that I did not believe them but that I respected that they did – maintaining my methodological agnosticism.

Because of this, there was one area in which I was not allowed – the personal one-on-one week-long deliverance clinic. During the day, the CEM office, and all its Pastors, evangelists and prayer warriors, offered this well-known clinic for serious, personal deliverance sessions. Periodically throughout my research, I asked if I could go in and observe the deliverance – I was never restricted access for their larger deliverance sessions at public events, but each time was told that I could not because it is a dangerous area and the only people allowed inside, ever, are the prayer warriors and individuals who are undergoing deliverance according to the specific ritual process. In other words, I would have to become born-again and submit myself to deliverance in order to see it; this was one particular part of their beliefs that seemed totally inflexible. At this point, I resigned myself to the fact that

this was one part of CEM that would remain off-limits, and I would just have to ask questions in order to understand what happened during the performance inside that room.

CEM’s Demonology

Before describing the four situations in which I tried to “fieldwork” deliverance rituals, it is necessary to give a brief description of CEM’s teachings about demons, also known as “demonology,” based on my listening to sermons and conducting interviews. According to these teachings, every individual who has not undergone deliverance is affected in some way by demons, or “agents of Satan,” which were let in by, among many other things, practising witchcraft, practising African traditional religions or Islam, ancestral curses going back generations, drinking alcohol, fornication, going to entertainment clubs, adultery, excessive gossip, tattoos or lying. These demons cause physical, emotional and spiritual problems in a person’s life. Born-again Christians are engaged in a spiritual battle against these satanic demons, and only with the Holy Spirit on their side can a person successfully fight these demons. One part of this fight is carried out through deliverance, which can range from short group deliverances at public church events, to week or month-long, private one-on-one rituals.

If you are a new born-again Christian, then you must undergo the private deliverance with the help of a more spiritually qualified individual who will pray with you throughout the ritual, to get rid of all the demons accumulated during your previously sinful life. Although it is possible for a non-born-again person who does not believe in the power of Jesus to have his or her demons forcefully driven out by another particularly powerful individual, this is dangerous for that unwilling individual, because if there is no Holy Spirit to “fill the empty hole,” then more demons would come in its place and leave that person worse off, effectively giving ammunition to the army of Satan. In other words, deliverance is only for the willing and faithful. The actual expelling of demons always involves a physical manifestation, anything from a yawn to a seizure and vomiting; the more violent the demon, the more violent the manifestation. Once a born-again Christian completes private deliverance and expels these demonic influences, he or she must be vigilant in keeping others from coming in by being faithful, avoiding all satanic practices and importantly, avoiding close contact with non-born-again Christians.

I have gone through the CEM demonology very quickly; there are many details, but the fundamental points I’ve outlined above are consistently and clearly preached, taught, explained and enforced in the majority of CEM events and discussions. All of the leaders, and most of the members of CEM, would explain

demonology in exactly the same way. With all this in mind, it is now possible to describe the fieldwork situations which not only helped me to learn about deliverance, but also to help me to learn about how to do fieldwork.

Situation One – Observing and Listening to Conversation

One of the first times I observed a performance of deliverance was two weeks into my fieldwork at the CEM annual three-day “Prison Revival” at Monrovia Central Prison. On each day, the last twenty minutes of the two-hour revival was devoted to a group deliverance for more than three hundred prisoners, where the pastor would pray over the group and individual prayer warriors would go into the crowd to pray with people who seemed to be expelling demons. On the third day, the church had brought toothpaste, soap and other items for the prisoners, but failed to distribute it in an orderly manner after deliverance. A small riot ensued, and when we all safely made it outside, many people without their mobile phones and wallets, there was a general consensus that the behaviour of the inmates was much to do with the Muslims who were praying near us at the same time (it was Friday afternoon), thereby allowing the demons to enter the newly converted and thus especially vulnerable Christian prisoners in the revival. To stop such things, they said, more praying should have been done before and during the revival. The conversation after this event perfectly illustrated the type of thing I was looking for in my research: a spiritual interpretation of a problematic physical event which seemed to me to have a fairly obvious physical explanation. Further, the proposed solution was, in my non-Pentecostal opinion, completely unrelated. This event, it seemed, proved that yes, physical events are considered to be rooted in the spiritual world; for CEM, this is serious.

Situation Two – Observing from Behind-the-Scenes

I continued to see similar deliverance rituals on huge scales at crusades, while I sat to the side of the stage counting offering money. At these events, deliverance was held most nights at the end of the service and after the altar call for people to give their life to Christ. As people began to visibly expel their demons, church workers would carry the “manifesting” individual over to a tarpaulin placed on either side of the stage, put them down, and go back into the crowd to get more people. On an average night, in a crusade crowd of 1000–2000 people, there would be about fifty individuals brought to the tarpaulin to expel their demons, left alone. The crusade would end with a prayer soon after deliverance, and many of these manifesting individuals would simply be left on the tarpaulin, some still manifesting; others lying down silently. Crowds leaving would step politely over them and all of the

church workers ignored them, unless they were trying to clean up and needed the tarpaulin back. This immediately got my attention, mainly because it was apparent that the way these manifesting individuals were being treated was not what was being taught by the pastors – that newly born-again individuals need to be guided through their deliverance, not left alone on the ground at the moment that they were expelling demons. Further, I wondered about the “danger” of doing a mass-deliverance, when some non-born-again people in the crowd might have their demons forcefully cast out, but causing more to come in, thereby essentially strengthening this kingdom of Satan. But how could I possibly test such an idea?

Situation Three – the Case of One Individual

My first research assistant, who I will refer to as Joseph, had been a member of CEM since its inception, and had been the one to introduce me to the ministry. He claimed to be born-again, had gone through deliverance three times, and from what I could tell was serious about the church. Meanwhile he was working with the ministry fixing generators, and would travel with them to crusades and work at the office every day. Four months into my fieldwork during one crusade outside of Monrovia, which I did not attend, the church called me to tell me that Joseph had been leaving the crusade grounds when he was supposed to be working, had a girlfriend, and was spending the night with her. This was absolutely forbidden behaviour, and when they questioned him about it, apparently he got aggressive. They also said that he had stolen a cell phone from a pastor for his girlfriend. Joseph was immediately sent home from the crusade and told to stop working with the church. Critically, they explained that the reason his behaviour was so unacceptable at the crusade was because when he left the crusade ground to go into the town which they called a “satanic stronghold,” he was picking up outside demons from the people he was associating with, bringing them back to the people working at the crusade and those undergoing deliverance during the event. “As a deliverance ministry,” they told me, “these things cannot happen. People see him out in the street, then at the crusade, they get scared.” This decision partially made sense to me. Joseph, because of his sinful behaviour, let in demons that could in turn be dangerous for others at the crusade. The church taught about this. What didn’t make sense was that *I* was allowed a significantly large amount of access to the church and its members and leadership, despite the demons the church knew I undoubtedly had.

These three situations described are only a small part of my experiences “field-working” deliverance rituals in this ministry, but they demonstrate the types of seeming contradictions I was faced with between teachings and practices, and the

different insights I gained depending on the approach that I took. Of course there are always differences between what is taught and what is practised in any religion, but this church was particularly adamant in their preaching that a good Christian must live according to these ideals, and that the consequences of not doing so are very dangerous. Thus I assumed that what seemed to be a contradiction was simply due to my not knowing all the details, or taking for granted that their “demonology” was flexible, or of my being too Western in assuming that everything must play out logically, rationally, and literally. Despite these suspicions, I still didn’t have concrete data to draw a coherent picture of the Pentecostal perceptions of evil, nor did I have any clear or consistent evidence of how conceptions of how this might lead to social and political change. I didn’t even know how people actually perceived the spirit world – the demonology seemed to be taken seriously and bordering on paranoia of demonic influence, but in practice it seemed to be much more flexible and utilized only in certain situations. The fourth situation, which I was able to effectively capitalize on, helped clarify some of these issues.

Situation Four – Fieldworker as Performer

One day towards the end of my fieldwork, when interviewing Reverend D about deliverance, he asked me whether I thought I needed deliverance. I told him that no, I didn’t think I had any demons causing problems, that I didn’t think deliverance would do anything for me, but that I’d still like to see what happened in the private deliverance room. He then, to my great surprise, said that yes, I could undergo deliverance because, as he said, “You are a child of God, you are special, you don’t know this but I do.” Anxious to see what happened in the deliverance room, despite my confusion as to why, now, I was allowed to go through it, I started my deliverance the following week.

Because I was allowed to undergo deliverance, despite remaining non-born-again and, in the eyes of the church, still full of demons, I figured now was a good time to truly embrace this demonic “otherness” and see what affect that had on the ritual, or in my being allowed to undergo it at all. By becoming the subject in the ritual I was trying to understand, I recognized that I had a chance to collect the data I needed to back up my suspicions that demonology and more broadly, CEM conceptions of the spirit world, are sometimes rooted in the physical world, not strictly the other way around.

The first step of my deliverance was to sit with an evangelist to fill out a long questionnaire used to diagnose the demons a person is affected with. The first question was, “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour,” to which I answered my typical response. Nearly half of the survey was skipped

over because it involved Liberian and African Traditional Religion-specific questions, for example, "Were you initiated into Sande secret society?" and "Where did your mother bury the placenta when she gave birth to you?" Other questions applied to my own recent past and worldly behaviour, details which the ministry had not previously known about because I had always been honest about my non-born-again lifestyle, but not flaunting it, for example the fact that I regularly drink alcohol and go to "social clubs," I have a large tattoo of a fire-breathing dragon, I love rock music and also I have many wonderful homosexual friends whom I do not think need to change. I imagined that now they really knew just how many demons I had, I surely wouldn't be allowed into the deliverance room. However, the evangelist whom I filled out the form with, in addition to Reverend D, seemed completely unbothered by this. I was diagnosed with a number of demons and told that for the next three days, I was to fast from midnight until 6pm, and come to the deliverance class that began at 9am sharp. The evangelist asked me, "Can you fast?" to which I replied, "Sure, why?" and she responded that, "Well, you don't have to do it for so long," which I thought was interesting consider the importance they seem to otherwise place on it.

In the first class, attended by about thirty men, women and children who were scheduled for deliverance that week, they went over the basics of deliverance, much of which I'd already learned from interviews and sermons, but they made it especially clear that "if you are not a full believer in this, you are wasting your time. You will hurt yourself more; be more open for attack if you're not ready for deliverance. It is very important you do everything, fast, pray, exactly like we say." After the class we all went outside and waited for our turn for "prayers" in the private deliverance room, which was the actual ritual during which we would actively fight the demons. After waiting for two hours, I was called into the room which I had waited for so long to see. To my surprise, there were already two individuals undergoing deliverance inside at one time, each with two prayer warriors attending to them. My two prayer warriors had me say, "Jesus" over and over again while one held my head firmly, rocking it back and forth; the other pushing my stomach in forcefully, both shouting "demon I rebuke you," calling out each demon by name and intermittently yelling in what they call "prayer language" which is a form of tongues. The same thing was happening to the other two individuals in the room for the deliverance, both of whom were manifesting - screaming, coughing, shaking, and eventually collapsing.

This went on for about twenty minutes; I did not manifest, fall over, scream, or do anything else but stand there with my eyes closed, repeating whatever they told me to; breathing out whenever they told me to. A similar ritual occurred on the

next two mornings, each getting progressively shorter. I never manifested. When a few of the prayer warriors asked, “What did you think?” and “How do you feel?” I told them, “About the same.” They laughed, shook my hand and said, “You are not used to the African way!” When I asked if they thought all my demons were gone, they said, “Well, it is a process. But it was effective.” I pressed the question a little further, asking how the deliverance could have been effective if I came out of it still insisting that I did not believe in its efficacy. The response from everyone was, “You don’t always know what God knows.”

In this situation especially, CEP’s usual teachings were adapted to allow for my participation; this adaptation was legitimate because, as the church leaders explained, it was ordained by God. Thus, while I was maintaining my role as a methodological agnostic participant-observer, from their standpoint I was a full participant. This major difference between my and CEP’s interpretations of my inclusion in the deliverance ritual, and more specifically CEP’s reasons for my eventually being included as a full participant, ended up providing me with major insights into the Liberian Pentecostal religious worldview. These insights would only have been possible with the flexible methodology that I adopted during my many experiences conducting fieldwork.

What I Gained by Taking Part in the Performance

The conclusion I was able to make that explained not only my inclusion in the deliverance ritual, but also much of my other fieldwork of deliverance rituals, was that the ideas and activities surrounding the Pentecostal spiritual worldview are always practical, and to be so they must be incredibly flexible and adaptable. Thus, *unless* something bad happens or something goes wrong, as in the prison, it is not necessarily perceived that there are pervasive demons that are constantly causing harm to anybody near them, as it did at the prison. Because I was trusted, liked and respected after working with the ministry for so many months, despite not being born-again, I was not considered to be a threat. There was no physical evidence of it, so therefore, there was no need to assign a metaphor of “spiritually dangerous” to me. Instead, I was a “special child of God,” simply lost about my spirituality. Joseph on the other hand, though a self-professed born-again, had demonstrated physically that he was not to be trusted, that he did not respect the ministry and that he caused problems for the leadership and its members. Therefore, he was cast as a “dangerous” spiritual and physical influence and because of this, asked to give up his close links to the ministry.

What now seems like a fairly obvious conclusion was, before that, quite confusing to me. The scholarship I had read before entering the field treated this

spiritual causality with such seriousness, that this "African worldview" was so instrumental in ideas and actions in the physical world, always, that I entered the field taking that very idea for granted. Then, when I heard discourses about the spirit world every day and saw such dramatic performances to address it, I never questioned its seriousness and applicability to all events. While my fieldwork affirmed that ideas surrounding the spirit world are pervasive in the Pentecostal religious imagination, exactly *how* they were applied to physical events was quite different.

Conclusion

The insight that deliverance rituals, in certain circumstances, are not as rigidly and literally performed as the teachings about them demand significantly informs my understanding of the potential social and political role of deliverance in Liberia. Through using flexible methodology, I obtained evidence to suggest that one need not be so alarmed by the "demon-ridden" ideas of causality that are so pervasive in Pentecostal churches, which can often make a church or individual appear disconnected from reality, paranoid, violent and/or unconstructive agents of social and political change. Instead, they are practical and flexible discourses to help account for and legitimize this-worldly events. My findings thus question the extent to which we can agree with Ellis and Ter Haar's proposal that an ordered spirit world will lead to an ordered physical world; it seems that for Liberian Pentecostals, the physical world must be perceived to be ordered.

To conclude, "fieldworking" the "spirit world" was always the most complicated and confusing part of my work in Liberia. For much of it I just had to gain trust and be patient. Perhaps I was lucky to be allowed such unlimited access. Still, being allowed this access was useful not just in terms of being able to observe an area previously "off limits," but equally important was figuring out why it was that I was allowed to participate despite my spiritual otherness, so that I could learn more, and answer the questions that I did not know how to ask.

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