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Experiencing God in three pentecostal communities**

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THE PRACTICE OF HOLY SPIRIT POSSESSION: EXPERIENCING GOD IN THREE
PENTECOSTAL COMMUNITIES

A Thesis by

Jonathan Burrow-Branine

Bachelor of Arts, Friends University, 2006

Submitted to the Department of Anthropology
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

August 2010

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PENTECOSTAL COMMUNITIES

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Anthropology.

Dorothy Billings, Committee Chair

Jens Kreinath, Committee Member

Anthony Gythiel, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To Jane

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to analyze Holy Spirit possession in Pentecostal communities through case studies in Jamaica, Ghana and Papua New Guinea. This study will contribute to the comparative concerns of the growing subfield of the anthropology of Christianity as well as address the lack of in-depth studies of Pentecostal rituals in the anthropological study of Pentecostalism. It is argued that the traditional anthropological study of spirit possession, while showing the similarity of possession phenomena among institutional and traditional religions, is somewhat limited by privileging either explanatory or interpretive approaches and by its traditional focus on non-Christian, small-scale spirit cults. In order to organize Holy Spirit possession for cross-cultural comparison, this thesis will review and suggest the usefulness of Emma Cohen's typology of executive and pathogenic forms of possession. Finally, building on a theoretical orientation of skilled learning as well as Catherine Bell's notion of ritualization, it will be argued that through the practice of Holy Spirit possession the Pentecostal's life-world is continuously being reworked and defined. In the study of Pentecostalism and Pentecostals, anthropologists need to take this practice seriously, not only in specific instances of possession, but also what this might mean for Pentecostal conceptions of personhood that informs belief and behavior.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to and Outline of Thesis

The growth rate and global spread of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity is truly astounding. For example, the conversion rate to the various forms of Christianity that can broadly be characterized as Holy Spirit-centered is estimated to be about nine million converts per year, a majority of which take place in Asia and the global south (Robbins 2004b:117). According to a recent report based on estimates from the World Christian Database, there may already be upwards of six hundred and fourteen million Pentecostal and charismatic Christians worldwide (Johnson 2009:482); and, some expect this number to exceed one billion by the year 2050 (Jenkins 2002:8). Moreover, shifting demographics are at play here, too. Because of rapid growth in the so-called ‘non-White’ world (Africa, Asia and Latin America), it has been predicted that by the year 2050 only one in five Christians will be non-Latino and White (3). The implications of the growth of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity for the global face of Christianity in general is captured by Phillip Jenkins’ observation that “if we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian *favela*” (2002:2).

Since Pentecostalism is becoming an increasingly important feature in the social landscape of the diverse peoples that anthropologists work among, whether or not the people being studied are Pentecostals themselves, it appears that Pentecostalism cannot be ignored. As some have remarked, for anthropologists, “Christianity can no longer be avoided” (Garriott and O’Neill 2008:381). Though Christianity in general has not necessarily been neglected in the anthropological literature (cf. Hann 2007), only recently has there been a discussion of an

‘anthropology of Christianity’ along the lines of the more established anthropologies of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, for example. In part, this thesis attempts to contribute to that end. In particular, this thesis seeks to contribute to our understanding of a feature of Pentecostalism that has been noticeably absent in the anthropological literature—the study of Pentecostal ritual, and in this case, the various rituals surrounding Holy Spirit possession. In order to do so, Pentecostal Holy Spirit possession will be approached through the context of several frames: the anthropology of Christianity and the anthropological study of Pentecostalism; three case studies—from Jamaica, Ghana and Papua New Guinea—of Holy Spirit possession in local contexts; and the anthropological study of possession and ritual. The main claims of this thesis can be summarized in the following way: the traditional anthropological study of spirit possession does illuminate certain aspects of Holy Spirit possession but is also limited in privileging either explanatory or interpretive models; secondly, Emma Cohen’s (2008) categories of executive and pathogenic possession are heuristic in organizing and comparing the diversity of Holy Spirit possession presented in the case studies; thirdly, building on practice theory, Catherine Bell’s (1992) notion of ritualization contributes to an understanding of Holy Spirit possession as social activity; finally, taking seriously the Pentecostal claim that possession by the Holy Spirit is transformative, the notion of a ritualized social body as well as recent work in the anthropology of religion that focuses on the practice and process of learning in religious experience suggests that we may think of Holy Spirit possession as practicing a new identity.

The following is a brief outline of the contents of the thesis. The remaining parts of the first chapter will be devoted to at least partially clarifying the terms ‘Pentecostalism’ and ‘Holy Spirit possession’ as used in the thesis as well as the method that was used in selecting the case studies. Pentecostalism will be presented in terms of a brief history, a discussion of the problems

in defining the object of study, and identifying several recurring characteristics in a broad ethnological sense. In chapter two, I will introduce recent literature that is self-described as seeking to contribute to the anthropology of Christianity while emphasizing emerging themes. Following this will be a brief overview of recent anthropological studies concerning Pentecostalism. With these, it will be emphasized that anthropologists have been concerned primarily with explaining Pentecostalism's growth through the frameworks of Modernity and globalization while Pentecostal ritual has been largely left unanalyzed. Chapter three is devoted to an in-depth look at Holy Spirit possession in three cultural contexts. I begin with Diane Austin-Broos' (1997) study of Jamaican Pentecostalism, followed by Birgit Meyer's (1999) study of Pentecostalism among the Peki Ewe of Ghana, and finish with Joel Robbins' (2004a) study of Pentecostalism among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. Though I organize some of this chapter along recurring themes and make some comparative and contrastive observations throughout, the start of the fourth chapter further organizes the material. Following this, classical anthropological definitions and theories of spirit possession are considered in light of the case studies to explore what the anthropological study of spirit possession can contribute to the study of Holy Spirit possession as well as what the study of Holy Spirit possession might contribute in return. In an attempt to further clarify and add analytic precision to our understanding of what was discovered in the case studies, I turn to Cohen (2008) and Cohen and Barrett's (2008) analysis and categorization of the recurring features of spirit possession in the ethnographic literature. Chapter five begins with recent work in the anthropology of religion that emphasizes the process of learning in religion in order to lead into a discussion revolving around understanding Holy Spirit possession as ultimately a transformative process both individually

and socially. Finally, with the help of Bell's (1992) notion of ritualization in the study of ritual, I attempt to situate Holy Spirit possession as social activity related to the discussion above.

Before introducing Pentecostalism and Holy Spirit possession, I should explain the inspiration for the titles of chapters four and five as well as the title of the thesis. The inspiration for the chapter titles came from not only the use of practice theory in Bell's (1992) study of ritual, but also and primarily from a 17th century Christian text, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. The latter is a series of teachings by a 17th century monk known as Brother Lawrence compiled by Father Joseph de Beaufort. This short work has nothing to do with Pentecostalism and should not be seen as such, but I was reminded of reading it as an undergraduate student as I was researching this thesis and thought the gist of Brother Lawrence's teachings somehow captured the spirit of it. The sum of his teaching was that anyone, anywhere could practice the presence of God by conversing with him during moments throughout the day. Practice becomes habit, and through habitual turning to God, his presence becomes palpable and utterly transforms one's identity. I hope that by the end of this thesis the role of Holy Spirit possession in a Pentecostal's life will remind you of Brother Lawrence's teachings, too.

Introducing Pentecostalism

Brief History

Pentecostalism is a notoriously hard concept to pin down. To explain how it is used throughout this paper it will be useful to briefly introduce its history, characteristics and diversity. The specific genealogy of the primary phenomena associated with Pentecostalism, baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, has its roots in the recording of the events that took place during Pentecost in the book of the Acts of the Apostles in the Christian Bible.

As the story goes, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, a group of Christians were gathered together in a room in Jerusalem preparing to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Pentecost when they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in languages (xenoglossia) that were not their own (Acts 2:1-47). Nonetheless, the current global spread of Pentecostalism can be usefully traced to Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 and then in 1906 in Los Angeles, California during the Azusa Street revivals (Miller and Yamamori 2007:17-18). In both of these cases the leaders of the movements, Charles Parham in the former and his student W. J. Seymour in the latter, taught that baptism in the Holy Spirit must be evidenced by the gift of speaking in tongues (Hollenweger 1972:22). Central to these revivals was the idea that God could be experienced tangibly through the filling or baptism in the Holy Spirit. This proved to have a lasting influence on American, and now global, Christianity. As Pentecostal scholar W. J. Hollenweger observed in 1972, “it will become harder to make a clear-cut distinction between American Pentecostals and American non-Pentecostals in the future, now that the experience and message of the baptism of the Spirit have found a way into all the American denominations” (1972:15). Furthermore, the separation of Pentecostals from mainstream churches, the establishment and then splintering of Pentecostal denominations, and the emergence of charismatic movements in other denominations, the Catholic Charismatic movement for example, adds to the confusion. This has become evident in the wide range of Christians who no longer go by the name of Pentecostal, or even charismatic, yet still share a belief in being born-again through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, with more or less emphasis being placed on the associated signs and gifts of the Spirit. These gifts of the spirit include speaking in tongues (primarily glossolalia), prophecy, visions, healing, dreams and the discernment of spirits, among others.

Moreover, this movement was not contained in the United States for very long. By 1910, the United States shared the five largest Pentecostal populations with South Africa, Nigeria, Germany and Trinidad and Tobago (Johnson 2009:482). What is truly astounding is that in a mere ten years after the first revivals in Topeka and Los Angeles, the Pentecostal population in South Africa was already estimated to be near one million, with just over one million worldwide. As I have already mentioned, in only one hundred years this has now exceeded six hundred million worldwide (482). Currently, though Pentecostals may be found in virtually every country on every continent, China, Brazil, the United States, Nigeria and India round out the top five countries with the largest populations of Pentecostals (480). And, the top five countries with the highest annual average growth rate, percent per year, in the first decade of the 21st century include Laos, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Burkina Faso and Bangladesh (481).

Definitional Issues

Along with these denominational and geographic considerations there is also a wide range of behavioral and theological diversity. All of this together makes it difficult to talk about Pentecostal Christians without ignoring important behavioral, geographic and theological differences. Anthropologists are certainly aware of the difficulty here. As Robbins has observed, “there is little standardization in social scientific usages of terms such as Pentecostal and charismatic, and several scholars have worried that these terms have become so broad as to be meaningless” (Robbins 2004b:119). However, for heuristic reasons, some sort of classification must be adhered to.

One useful way to organize this diversity is to understand charismatic Christian movements in terms of three waves. Johnson (2009) summarizes and organizes these three

waves as Pentecostal, Charismatic and neocharismatic. First, Pentecostals are defined as those that remain in mainstream Pentecostal churches and adhere to the baptism in the Holy Spirit (separate from conversion) with the gifts of the Spirit, especially glossolalia, as being evidence. Charismatics, by contrast, the main expansion of this wave beginning after 1950, are distinguished as being in nonpentecostal denominations but still maintain baptism or renewal in the Holy Spirit with less of an emphasis on evidence through the gifts of the Spirit. Finally, emerging around 1950, neocharismatics are defined as evangelical or other Christians, not related to the former movements, who become filled with and experience the Holy Spirit (not usually referring to it as baptism in the Spirit or emphasizing the need for the evidence of tongues), and who leave nonpentecostal denominations without identifying themselves as Pentecostals or Charismatics (and may reject Pentecostal terminology altogether). Moreover, there are numerous emic labels for these groups, such as Independent, Postdenominationalist, Restorationist, Radical, Neo-Apostolic, 'Third Wave,' etc (479-481).

The term 'Renewalists' is sometimes used to refer collectively to these three movements to hearken back to the renewal that began at the turn of the 20th century and to emphasize the similarities among them (Johnson 2009). In this paper, I am simply using the term Pentecostalism, not to indicate classic Pentecostalism, but as a broad term that includes these three waves as those Christians that place singular importance on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the associated gifts of the Spirit, whether or not glossolalia is required as evidence. Similarly, Robbins (2004b), in a review of the globalization of Pentecostalism, has chosen to use the broad phrase, "Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity," to refer to a similar range of Christianities. As he notes, however, a distinction should be made between Pentecostalism and fundamentalism. Despite some similarities most fundamentalists reject Pentecostalism primarily

on the basis of doctrinal differences concerning the availability of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (2004b:123-124). Moreover, Robbins references a distinction made by theologian Harvey Cox that captures an important difference: “Cox (1995) distinguishes between ‘fundamentalist’ religions focused on doctrinal purity and ‘experientialist’ ones that stress the ability of followers to experience the transcendent” (Robbins 2004b:123). Not only does this capture an important difference, it also captures, in my understanding, a crucially important characteristic of those Christians I am referring to collectively as Pentecostals, that is, the experience of God through the presence of the Holy Spirit. In another place, Robbins, somewhat offhandedly, refers to Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity as “Holy Spirit-centered Christianity” (2009:136). Another way that charismatic and Pentecostal Christians are often referred to, by both insiders and outsiders, is by the phrase, ‘Spirit-led Christians’ (Miller and Yamamori 2007:2). Holy Spirit-centered Christianity and Spirit-led Christians seem closer to the phenomena that is under consideration in this thesis and may prove to be better way forward for anthropologists dealing with similar issues. Nonetheless, as already mentioned, the term Pentecostalism will be used throughout this paper to refer collectively to the traditions of Christianity introduced above.

Characteristics of Pentecostalism

Given the diversity that was briefly sketched above, what can be identified as general characteristics of Pentecostalism as has been described in the ethnographic literature? As a start, I agree with Droogers (2001:44) that “local variations mean that an over-essentialist picture of Pentecostalism needs to be avoided.” Nonetheless, it seems useful to make some general observations concerning the characteristics of Pentecostalism in a broad ethnological sense to deepen our understanding of individual Pentecostals. The following introduces recurring

themes and the Pentecostal diversity that is seen in the literature though it should be emphasized that this is by no means an exhaustive list. Moreover, much of what is introduced here will present itself again throughout the paper.

Individualism. One common characteristic of Pentecostalism that is often noted in the literature, which it shares more broadly with Protestantism, is that it encourages individualism (cf. van Dijk 2002:50; Brison 2007:25; Meyer 1998:320; for a critique of this view, see Mosko 2010). This is evident in the emphasis on a personal experience of the Holy Spirit and the teaching that in the final analysis, only the individual is accountable before God (Robbins 2004a:293).

Discontinuity. Robbins claims that Pentecostal and charismatic Christian culture is one of “rupture and discontinuity” (2007:127) as evident, for example, in their emphasis on radical change that takes place in conversion (see also, Meyer 1998) and through eschatological beliefs (for a critique of discontinuity see Englund and Leach 2000).

Paradoxical Nature. Droogers (1998, 2001) and Robbins (2004b) both have emphasized the paradoxical (or seemingly contradictory) nature of Pentecostalism. In Robbins’ review of the literature, he makes the following observation:

On the one hand, many argue that [Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity] consistently replicates its doctrines, organizational features, and rituals in canonical, Western form wherever it is introduced.... On the other hand, many authors, including many of those who remark on [Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity’s] ability to replicate itself successfully in different cultures, stress that converts are quick to indigenize [Pentecostal and charismatic] forms of Christianity, and they credit these churches with remarkable ability to adapt themselves to the cultures into which they are introduced. [Robbins 2004b:118]

Similarly, Droogers (2001:6-7) lists paradoxical and contradictory features of Pentecostalism that seem to be present in the literature. As examples, Pentecostal churches can be both egalitarian and hierarchical (in that there is an emphasis on egalitarian participation in religious experience while there is still a hierarchical structure of authority) and church services are typically highly expressive yet are not without structure.

Eschatology and Dualistic Worldview. As Droogers puts it, for the Pentecostal “the world is divided into two parts: that of God and his believers, and that of the devil and his followers” (2001:46). This is a world wherein God and the Devil wage war over humans, and much of what takes place in life is interpreted in these terms. In many ways this creates ambivalence towards the world that the Pentecostal lives in. Also contributing to this ambivalence is the common belief that the second coming of Jesus, with the associated apocalyptic events, is imminent (Droogers 1998:7).

Trinity. Though a majority of Pentecostals resemble most other Christians in their Trinitarian understanding of God (a single deity composed of three persons in the form of God the Father, Jesus the son, and the Holy Spirit), Pentecostals may emphasize the specific configuration and relationship of the Trinity in differing ways. For example, some may be more “Jesu-centric” (cf. Austin-Broos 1997:17) than others who might address the Holy Spirit or God the Father more exclusively. However, what Pentecostals share in common almost everywhere is the privileged status given to the Holy Spirit as an actor in the Pentecostal life (Droogers 2001:45).

Gifts of the Spirit. As already mentioned, not all Pentecostals stress the importance of the presence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (especially glossolalia, but also healing, prophecy, dreams, visions, etc.) as evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit, but this is nonetheless a central feature of Pentecostalism most everywhere. Whether or not gifts of the Spirit take a lead role, the reality of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in most Pentecostals' lives almost always does.

Conversion. The conversion experience is also a central feature to Pentecostal life. As Droogers summarizes nicely, "to many Pentecostals, conversion is a dramatic personal event, by far the most important of their lives. And when it is linked to the experience of the Spirit, it has a strong physical component. Its consequences are felt in daily life, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week" (2001:45). The conversion process can vary among Pentecostals. For example, some may emphasize a two-step process of conversion marked by baptism in water followed by a later moment of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Others may understand the process to be all-inclusive.

Introducing Holy Spirit Possession

Definitional Issues

With a few broad sketches of Pentecostalism now in place, I will now clarify my use of the phrase, 'Holy Spirit possession.' As a point of departure, I am using possession in the Pentecostal context to refer to the infilling or baptism of the Holy Spirit as well as other occasions where the Holy Spirit is considered to enter or reside within the conceived bodily space of the individual thereby informing one's belief and practice. From this, we can see that

this notion lacks some analytic precision. This I hope to add in chapter four. What I am clearly not addressing in this thesis, not directly anyway, are other forms of possession that Pentecostals are sometimes associated with. This may include possession by any number of spirits or forces that might inhabit a Pentecostal's world, including ancestral, nature or demonic spirits.

The possession phenomena that I am interested in goes by many terms in the literature, but is always associated with the Holy Spirit as the third member of the Christian Trinity. The range of phenomena under consideration includes experiences described by Pentecostals as the infilling or being filled with the Spirit, baptism (baptized) in the Spirit, being drunk in the Spirit, being slain in the Spirit, among others. Moreover, I am not limiting the discussion to those moments of 'full-infilling,' but any moment where the Holy Spirit is revealed as residing in the body.

The Politics of Representation

One final issue that needs to be considered in discussing this phenomena in terms of possession is that some Pentecostals contest or do not use this term themselves, particularly Pentecostals in the West. As an example, Anthony Buckley and Mary Catherine Kennedy (1995), in their study of Pentecostalism in Northern Ireland, report that the Pentecostals they worked with made a firm distinction that one may be possessed by the Devil but not by God. While discussing being filled with the Holy Spirit, one member of the church made the following claim: "I mean, it's only Satan that possesses. I mean, the Lord never ever does" (1995:132). Beyond this, the activity and behavior associated with this and other related phenomena have sometimes been a source of marginalization for Pentecostals. Even more, in some cases it has

been used by non-Pentecostal Christians to marginalize Pentecostals as non-Christian or to characterize them as a cult.

These issues may be sensitive on another level, too. Van Dijk and Pels (1996) recount a story based on an episode originating from van Dijk's fieldwork in Malawi. While still in Malawi after spending almost a year among a group of young Pentecostal preachers, van Dijk published a short article in a local magazine that described activity in the church from an outsider's perspective that he thought would nonetheless be interesting to the people he had worked with. In the article, he used inverted commas around the word 'infilling' and used the word 'ecstatic' to describe what he saw. According to van Dijk and Pels, "the use of inverted commas for 'infilling' indicated how the possession by the Holy Spirit was perceived by some of the interlocutors, while the word 'ecstatic' underscored the distancing attitude of the author" (1996:258). The day after the article appeared van Dijk was summoned by those he had written about to explain why he had reported the episode in this manner. They were upset because they understood van Dijk to be rejecting their authority as inspired prophets who were not really filled by the Holy Spirit. According to some, this is an example of an anthropologist disempowering those they study by translating their culture into and dominating it through academic discourse (Asad 1986a). However, as Billings has argued, though the anthropological tradition has been criticized as perpetuating an unequal balance of power and contributing to the colonial agenda, anthropologists actually "came to record...for posterity, to understand, to appreciate, to listen," and "if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we did our best to flatter" (1992:50). By referring to activity that an individual Pentecostal would not call Holy Spirit possession as such, it is not my intent to ignore their view or to somehow contribute to any further marginalization. I do not intend my use of Holy Spirit possession to characterize these individuals as primitive or as

a cult in the derogatory sense of these words. It is only my intent to find a way to talk meaningfully in a cross-cultural sense about related phenomena and to take seriously what they have to say about the experience of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Method

Before turning to a review of the literature on the anthropology of Christianity and the recent anthropological study of Pentecostalism, I would like to elaborate on the method used in selecting the case studies in chapter three. I first limited my selection to monographs that were written by anthropologists. Moreover, though other monographs were available, I also sought out those that were a sufficient source for information on Pentecostal ritual and Holy Spirit possession. Several other monographs that I consulted only dealt with these issues in a somewhat superficial way. Moreover, though journal articles and chapters in edited volumes could have provided similar information, I also wanted the sociocultural context that only a full-length monograph could provide. Finally, I intentionally chose monographs from different parts of the world.

CHAPTER 2

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY AND PENTECOSTALISM

The Anthropological Contribution to the Study of Christianity

Christianity and Christians, as a domain of study on their own terms, though of course present in the anthropological literature, has only recently started to be dealt with by anthropologists in a unified, sustained way. In part, this is so because of the changing nature of what anthropologists built the discipline on, the study of small-scale, traditional, non-Western cultures. In a time since anthropological darlings, such as ‘local’ and ‘culture,’ have been called into question (cf. Basch, et al. 1994; Clifford 1986), and when the Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity appear to be taking over the world (Jenkins 2002; Johnson 2009), some anthropologists could not help but shift their focus along with these changes (Geertz 2005; Hefner 1998). The question then becomes, when the study of Christianity is already inundated with theologians, philosophers, church historians, sociologists, etc., what might an anthropological contribution be? I believe that anthropologists bring several things to the table.

First, with the increasing emphasis on globalization and transnationalism, with some even calling into question the possibility of local knowledge (cf. Basch, et al. 1994), anthropologists are in a unique position to study these processes in local contexts. Similarly, anthropologists studying Christianity are more likely to emphasize ‘christianities,’ or the unique ways in which Christianity becomes local. As John Barker has observed:

Theologians and church historians, although acknowledging the rich variety of expression that Christianity has developed over its long history, take a universalist track, regarding it as a single entity with distinct core beliefs and forms of organization. Anthropologists, in contrast, tend to focus on local perceptions and adaptations, stressing the malleability of Christianity over its systemic features, in effect writing about “christianities.” [Barker 2008:377]

In other words, anthropologists are quick to recognize that people are embedded in local cultures in ways that shape belief and behavior that are unique to particular settings. Secondly, anthropologists maintain that culture is integrated. This being the case, Christianity, despite the claim made by some of its practitioners and theologians that Christianity is somehow supracultural (see Niebuhr 2001), is integrated into culture as well. This means that anthropologists are likely to study how changes in one aspect of a culture, be they economic, political, social, ideological, etc., will affect how Christians conceptualize and practice their faith. Contributing to this is the tendency for anthropologists to take seriously the notion that Christianity, like all other sociocultural constructs, is also a cultural construction. Thirdly, though more and more people from various fields are adopting similar methods, anthropologists bring to the table their “central ritual” and the “*sine qua non* for full status as an anthropologist,” participant-observation fieldwork (Stocking 1992a:16,13). Finally, anthropologists bring to the table an attempt at a holistic view of what it means to be human, integrating biology and culture, explanation and explication, feeding off of the disciplinary tension between the sciences and humanities.

With these considerations in mind, I will briefly review recent works that are self-described as seeking to contribute to the development of an anthropology of Christianity, focusing primarily on the themes they suggest are fruitful for the development of this subfield. Several of the authors (see e.g., Robbins 2003, 2007; Garriott and O’Neill 2008) take as inspiration the success of other anthropologies of world religions, such as Buddhism, but particularly that of the anthropology of Islam. In particular, these authors find it notable that a somewhat coherent field that is now the anthropology of Islam has developed despite various stifling problems early on (see for example, the early efforts to define the object of study in el-

Zein 1977 and Asad 1986b). As Robbins (2007) has claimed, though anthropologists have long studied aspects of Christianity to one degree or another, there remains no real resemblance to those who make other world religions their main area of study:

Anthropologists studying communities that practice these religions regularly engage colleagues whose research focuses on parts of the world other than those in which they work. They have a robust sense that, despite the local differences that are everywhere apparent between cases, they are studying a common object or at least a set of comparable objects. They also have “anthropologist of Islam” or “anthropologist of Buddhism” as one of their most prominent scholarly entities.

I take it as virtually self-evident that the anthropology of Christianity in this sense does not yet exist. [Robbins 2007:5-6]

Several recent publications have begun to address this disparity.

The Anthropology of Christianity

The first unified effort to establish an anthropology of Christianity can be traced usefully to a special issue of *Religion* (Robbins, ed. 2003) published in 2003, where Joel Robbins and others began to explore a conceptual framework and themes for comparative research in this field. In this publication, the contributions by Robbins (2003), Droogers (2003) and historian Frankiel (2003) offer the clearest points of departure. Robbins', who is one of the more vocal and key advocates of this effort (Garriott and O'Neill 2008:382), primary ethnographic fieldwork is among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea where he makes use of structural and semiotic approaches to understand Urapmin cultural change and Christianity (Robbins 2004a). He is currently a professor and the chair of the anthropology department at the University of California, San Diego (Robbins 2009:65). Robbins' essay (2003), which serves as an introduction to the special issue of *Religion*, attempts to identify why the anthropology of Christianity has been slow to develop. He identifies a cultural explanation and a theoretical explanation. Culturally speaking, Robbins makes the case that Christianity has been assumed to

be too familiar and not worth studying on its own terms because it shares a common tradition and has participated in the dialogue that has shaped anthropological discourse. In the case of a theoretical hindrance, Robbins identifies the recent disciplinary uneasiness concerning comparative studies, stating that “it is hard to escape the conclusion that at best we are dealing with Christianities rather than with Christianity, and that at worst these Christianities really have rather little in common with one another” (2003:193). Therefore, paralleling el-Zein’s claim in regards to an early anthropology of Islam, the anthropology of Christianity as an object of study seemingly “dissolves as well” (el-Zein 1977:252). Yet Robbins contends that these struggles to define an object of study are necessary to get the program off the ground, and just as el-Zein’s claim did not bury the anthropology of Islam, the anthropology of Christianity can have a place in the discipline as well. In order to realize a comparative approach, he mentions a couple of themes for future research. First, Robbins suggests that anthropologists should focus on the tension between everyday mundane life and the experience of the transcendental that Christians live with. Secondly, studies focused on the way “Christianity becomes local and forms relations with the cultures with which it comes into contact” would give material for comparative efforts as well (2003:196).

Elsewhere, while also rehearsing similar concerns, Robbins (2007) dwells on the idea that because anthropology is a discipline that privileges continuity, this, too, has stood in the way of an anthropology of Christianity. Robbins makes the case that anthropology is a “science of continuity,” arguing that “cultural anthropologists have for the most part either argued or implied that the things they study—symbols, meanings, logics, structures, power dynamics, etc.—have an enduring quality and are not readily subject to change,” thereby deemphasizing the possibility for radical change (2007:9). He is not arguing that continuity thinking is incorrect; he simply

wants to expose a common theoretical assumption held by our discipline. To illustrate this, Robbins compares the anthropological concept of time with the Christian concept of time. Whereas anthropologists likely have “a desacralized, naturalized view of time...in which all moments are alike and effect follows cause in a predictable manner,” the Christian view of time allows for the possibility of radical change (2007:12).

Returning to another essay from the special issue of *Religion*, André Droogers' (2003) contribution to the volume attempts to frame a theoretical and methodological approach to studying the power dynamics in Christian communities. Droogers is faculty in the department of social and cultural anthropology at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and conducted fieldwork among Pentecostal communities in the Congo and Brazil (263, 266). Of interest in his essay is his discussion of what distinguishes the anthropology of Christianity from other disciplines that make Christianity their object of study. The perspective that he takes is to frame the anthropology of Christianity within the anthropological study of religion in general with its distinct history, methodology and theories. He concludes that the “anthropologist would probably do small-scale contextualized qualitative studies among groups of Christian believers, with a preference for the study of popular religion, as well as the glocal [the study of global processes in a local context] dimension” (2003:265). The theoretical approach he develops, drawn from cognitive anthropology, is a three dimensional model of power relations in Christian communities based on the assumption that every relationship is a relationship of power. The model includes external (between the community and neighbors, whether religious or secular), internal (or how power is distributed within the community with emphasis on vertical and horizontal organization), and human-divine relationships (or how the relationship to the deity is conceptualized in terms of power). Furthermore, he suggests that a fourth dimension might be

added to include the relationship between the community and the ethnographer. Finally, as an alternative to methodological agnosticism, Droogers advances two methodological approaches that might be useful in the anthropological study of Christianity: a phenomenological approach to take lived experience seriously that ‘does justice’ to such aspects as the experience of the sacred, which has typically not been done due to the ‘strained’ relationship between science and Christianity; and methodological ludism (from the Latin *ludus* meaning play) and playing with the boundaries between religion and science.

The last contribution that I will discuss from the collection is by Tamar Frankiel (2003:281) who is an historian with an interest in the subfield of the historical study of Christianity (not a Church historian). Frankiel opens her essay with the following questions: “Can we do an anthropology of “Christianity”? Is that such a large topic, such an enormous abstraction, that we cannot hope even to identify our subject matter properly?” (2003:281). In response to these questions, and despite what she considers to be a continuing opposition to making generalizations and comparative studies, Frankiel asserts that “historians and anthropologists in this area of study generally agree that Christianity *is* an entity of a sort—an abstract entity, one whose boundaries are shifting and uncertain—but one whose components seem to have persisted over time and space, one which has an important influence on human lives and therefore deserves study” (2003:282). She suggests that Christianity could be defined in such a way to account for the diversity seen in the various kinds of Christianities by making use of Wittgenstein’s ‘family resemblances.’ She finally identifies and challenges assumptions that might impede the development of the anthropology of Christianity, such as anthropological assumptions of continuity (following Robbins 2007) and the disciplinary preoccupation with the exotic.

Another anthropologist that has been influential in shaping the development of the anthropology of Christianity, or at least, anyway, a conversation about it, is Fenella Cannell, an anthropologist at the London School of Economics who has conducted fieldwork among Catholic rice-farmers in the Philippines as well as Mormons in Utah and New York (1999, 2005). In the introduction to a volume she edited devoted to developing the anthropology of Christianity (Cannell, ed. 2006), Cannell (2006) discusses the uneasiness and reluctance of anthropologists to consider Christianity as a valid domain of research, reviews the history of scholarly discourse and ethnographic record concerning Christianity, and attempts to outline the object of study. Throughout her essay she emphasizes the dialectic between anthropology and Christianity—how anthropological assumptions about and attitudes towards Christianity are defined by this relationship and how Christianity has shaped anthropological discourse and theory in more broadly defined ways. Cannell suggests that one reason for this reluctance is because Christianity is considered to be already known and therefore uninteresting for research. Cannell emphasizes that, given the complexity and variability of Christian belief cross-culturally, it is important to be explicit and clear about what kind of Christianity is being talked about. Moreover, she argues that anthropologists should question the assumption within the discipline that Christianity is essentially ascetic and focus, rather, on its paradoxical nature. Furthermore, she reviews how Christianity is largely absent in the ethnographic record and, if present, was relegated to Marxist, colonial or postcolonial studies that did not really take it seriously as valid for academic inquiry on its own terms. She also discusses themes that have been the focus of more recent studies concerning Christianity, for example: the diversity of Christianities, conversion, modernity and secularism. The closest Cannell comes to defining the object of study is where she claims that “Christianity is a complex historical object whose parameters are by no

means arbitrary but which also cannot plausibly be described except as being in tension with itself” and that “we must be cautious of anthropological paradigms of Christianity that present it as solely an ascetic tradition, rather than as a fundamentally paradoxical tradition” (2006:43). There are two implications for applying Cannell’s working definition to anthropological studies: first, how a single culture interacts with Christianity is dependent on its own particular history; and secondly, studies “can never contain only a single message with single possibilities of interpretation, because Christian doctrine is in itself paradoxical” (2006:43).

In another essay, Cannell (2005) attempts to address anthropological assumptions about Christianity and kinship using ethnographic material from her fieldwork among Mormons. Central to her essay is questioning the assumption that Mormonism is “inauthentic Christianity” and why this assumption is made (2005:339). In response to anthropologist friends that questioned her interest in Mormonism while assuming that it represented inauthentic Christianity, Cannell argues that “to the anthropologist, however, a ‘real Christian’ must mean anyone who seriously so describes him- or herself” and “to proceed otherwise is to pre-judge what the content of a religion might be on the basis of highly selective, and historically particular, canons of orthodoxy” (2005:349). Cannell also addresses several related issues: she makes the case that anthropology has assumed that Christianity is an “essentially ascetic and other-worldly religion,” that “there has been a tendency to undertheorize the subject of Christianity” in general, and finally, that anthropologists have assumed “that Christianity was important mainly or only as a harbinger of secular modernity” (2005:340). Next, Cannell discusses anthropological assumptions concerning kinship in light of Mormon notions of kinship. She concludes with three implications for anthropology discovered through the study of Mormonism as authentic Christianity. First, she argues that Christian notions of genealogy,

embedded in the spirit/body dichotomy, played a role in the formation of the methodology of genealogy within the discipline with its emphasis on physical descent (this runs contrary to Mormon ideas of descent). With modernity, she argues that “the model of time implicit in the concept of modernity is itself derived from the Christian theological idea of the transcendent” (2005:350-351), that is, the idea of periods of time of a different kind, not degree. Finally, with religion, she argues that Mormonism as a religion shares features with modernism “without necessarily being in any way secular” (2005:351). In the end, Cannell suggests that Christianity played a primary role in the shaping of the social sciences, including anthropology, which “is not always so ‘secular’ as it likes to think” (2005:351-352).

Another edited volume that has been influential in shaping this discussion is titled, *The Limits of Meaning* (Engelke and Tomlinson, eds. 2006). In the introduction to the volume, Matt Tomlinson and Matthew Engelke (2006) describe the conceptual framework that serves as a theme for each of the contributions and discusses what they perceive to be their contribution to the anthropology of Christianity. The authors focus the volume by asking the questions, “if words and things can be meaningful, can they also be not meaningful, or even meaningless,” and “moreover, is ‘meaning’ always a necessary or even productive analytical category in anthropological work” (2006:1)? They offer two reasons for examining these questions with case studies on Christianity: first, because Christians typically focus on meaning themselves; and secondly, because it has been argued that the anthropological emphasis on meaning comes from Christianity itself. The clearest definition of meaning that the authors offer is that “meaning is a sociocultural product emergent in practice, a consequence of boundary-drawing that is generated in diverse, consequential, and often unpredictable ways” (2006:26). Through the study of when something fails to be meaningful, the authors argue, anthropologists are able

to critically evaluate what is meaningful. Finally, according to Engelke and Tomlinson, the idea that Christianity has a cultural logic is what makes the anthropology of Christianity unique when compared to earlier work.

Finally, William Garriott and Kevin Lewis O'Neill (2008) offer another self-described contribution to developing the anthropology of Christianity. Here, the authors seek to contribute by arguing for a dialogic approach and suggesting that a useful entry point for comparative research might be to stop asking what problems are posed by Christianity to anthropology, but, rather, what problems are posed by Christianity to Christians. One example that the authors give for this approach is to examine how the idea of 'who is a Christian' is contested among Christian communities and what the implications are for such formulations. The authors use the term dialogic in the sense of the discourse that emerges in the interaction between subjects. They suggest that anthropologists focus on such "dialogic moments" as those that concern, for example, who is a Christian, issues of authority and practice, and tensions over cultural and social identity and relationships (2008:388).

Emerging Themes and Points of Critique

Several themes emerge from this brief review of the literature. First, there remains the problem of defining the object of study. A second common theme concerns Christianity's relationship to the discipline, whether they focus on anthropological neglect of Christianity as an object of study or on the seemingly dialectical relationship between the two. There is moreover an emphasis on establishing a body of material for comparative purposes. Also, there is an emphasis on the study of Christianity in its local context while accounting for wider networks of influence (regional, global/transnational). There is an emphasis on understanding the 'cultural

logic' that Christianity provides for Christians. Similarly, there is an emphasis on studying how Christians themselves in diverse contexts define and describe their own experience as Christians as well as the implications for this identification. Finally, there is an emphasis on discourse. Only a few of these themes will be elaborated on below.

The establishment of the anthropology of Christianity as a subfield is not without its dissidents. Chris Hann (2007:383), who is affiliated with the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Saale), Germany, offers a critical review of some of this literature (primarily Cannell, ed. 2006; Engelke and Tomlinson, eds. 2006; and Robbins, ed. 2003). In this essay, he argues that none of the authors make a satisfactory case for what is unique to Christianity and therefore fail to properly identify it as an object of study. For example, he asks the question, "if transcendence, asceticism, the dialectics of orthodox versus heretical, mediating institutions etc are not peculiar to Christianity after all, then what is left to justify demarcating the anthropology of Christianity as a field of study" (Hann 2007:402)? Hann insists, rather, that it would better to "proceed on the basis of problems" since anthropologists have thus far been unsuccessful in clearly identifying appropriate and valid units and levels of comparison (2007:406). In the end he maintains "that problem-focused comparisons ranging across all intra- and inter-religious boundaries, informed by *longue durée* analysis as well as ethnographic minutiae, offer a better way forward" (2007:406). Hann's alternative seems to have some merit. As was discussed in the introduction concerning how to define Pentecostalism, notions of what Christianity is and what that might mean for those who call themselves Christians are extremely elusive, as is evident from how highly contested these notions can be. However, if we apply Hann's logic, would we also reject the anthropology of Islam, of Buddhism, of Hinduism, etc.? Hann's point seems to be valid, but it does not seem to be grounds for stifling a potentially

fruitful and diverse study of our ‘cultural other’ (cf. Harding 1991) while also dissolving the primary organizational source for several billion people’s worldview (Garriott and O’Neill 2008:381). It is telling that one of the sources Hann cites to show that certain features are not really unique to Christianity comes from a work that assumes the validity of the anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism (Gellner 2002). As already quoted above, Frankiel (2003) articulates a more sensible approach: “historians and anthropologists in this area of study generally agree that Christianity *is* an entity of a sort—an abstract entity, one whose boundaries are shifting and uncertain—but one whose components seem to have persisted over time and space, one which has an important influence on human lives and therefore deserves study” (2003:282). One way forward might be Garriott and O’Neill’s (2008) approach, which is also problem-oriented, to begin with the problems that Christianity poses to Christians.

The Anthropological Study of Pentecostalism

Whereas the literature that is self-described as attempting to cultivate the anthropology of Christianity is relatively recent, the anthropological study of Pentecostalism has a deeper history with more coherent organizational frameworks. Most of the anthropological, and social scientific in general, research on Pentecostalism has been geared towards somehow explaining its rapid growth. Broadly, these explanations discuss this growth in ways that they emphasize one end of several dualistic pairs, such as change and response, external or internal features, one-way flows or two-way flows, or features of society or Pentecostalism itself. Some authors emphasize Marxist explanations, emphasizing marginalization and class struggle, with Pentecostalism either an opiate for the masses or a form of resistance (cf. Droogers 2001:50). Similarly, some have focused on its relationship to neoliberalism, including how it produces

favorable socioeconomic conditions for Pentecostalism (Comaroff 2009) to how Pentecostalism facilitates this process. Still others have argued that Pentecostalism flourishes under and gives believers a space to negotiate the conditions of modernity (Meyer 1998). Some have emphasized a one directional flow of hegemony from the West, while others imagine global flows and a communication between the global and local resulting in ‘hybridity’ (cf. Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001) or ‘creolization’ (cf. Droogers 2001:52). Recently, theories of globalization have become the organizing force, with authors variously emphasizing how Pentecostalism encourages globalization (Coleman 2000) or how Pentecostalism’s ‘cultural content’ articulates remarkably well with the global world system (Robbins 2004b).

However, most of these explanations can be, very roughly, grouped under two broad terms—modernity and globalization—and a brief review of this literature will help illustrate some of these themes. However, although I may use an author to emphasize one particular theme there is also much overlap in most of the studies. Moreover, although most of the current literature does not address Pentecostal ritual in a direct way, as this thesis intends to do, it is worth reviewing to give a sense of the ongoing conversations in the field. I will finish this review by rehearsing Robbins’ (2004b, 2009) arguments for the anthropological need to focus more on Pentecostal ritual.

Modernity

Several authors have commented on the persuasiveness of theories of modernity, some emphasizing something like a condition of modernity while others focus on various aspects of the modernization process, that have organized much of the research on Pentecostalism over the last several decades (Brodwin 2003:87; Droogers 2001:49; Englund and Leach 2000).

Reflecting on the literature on Pentecostalism in Latin America and the Caribbean, Paul Brodwin (2003) usefully identifies the Weberian source for those that dwell on the conditions of modernity. Essentially, these arguments focus on the rapid cultural change that is introduced by the process of modernization, resulting in socially and economically dislodged and marginalized people, and Pentecostalism succeeds by successfully restoring social order (87). For Robbins, the terms ‘deprivation and anomie’ summarize such arguments (2004b:123). Within this framework, Brodwin (2003:87) suggests that some authors focus on how Pentecostalism creates individuals that are particularly successful under modern conditions, some focus on how Pentecostalism is a space where individuals are able to negotiate their own position, and finally, those who emphasize Marxist notions of conflict and class struggle will focus on how Pentecostalism services the desires of those in control. Droogers (2001:49-51) summarizes the explanations for Pentecostalism’s success in a similar way, though he addresses global Pentecostalism in general. However, as a criticism of studies that rely on modernization theory, while often parsimonious in describing the context for much of Pentecostal growth, both Brodwin and Droogers suggest that it fails to explain why people actually choose Pentecostalism over other choices on the market.

Jean Comaroff’s (2009) study of the relationship between neoliberalism and Pentecostalism illustrates extraordinarily well the emphasis on deprivation and anomie that characterizes some of those explanations based on theories of modernity. Jean Comaroff is most widely known (cf. Robbins 2007:7), along with John Comaroff, both affiliated with the anthropology department at the University of Chicago, for their two-volume work, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997), concerning the Tswana of South Africa that details cultural change that occurred during colonialism and the introduction of Protestant

Christianity. Returning to the aforementioned study, Jean Comaroff (2009) takes neoliberalism as the primary focus while also deftly integrating the political, globalization and modernity. Comaroff is exploring the relationship between neoliberalism and what she terms ‘theologico-politics,’ which is used to denote changing ideas concerning the religious as illustrated by the rapid growth of Pentecostalism and its emerging public and political involvement as a popular movement in the 21st century. According to Comaroff, the global spread of neoliberalism is characterized by an “abstract media” in the process of generating wealth, a “globalizing” of the “division of labor,” transnational corporations working outside of state regulation, and the ultimate “undermining” of “the very idea of a national economy” (2009:23). Therefore, this “epochal shift in the relation of capital, labor, consumption, and place” has “fundamentally disrupted” the relationship between the political and the economic and reformulates conceptualizations of society (2009:23). Noting the affinity between neoliberalism and revitalization movements in general, Comaroff identifies three dimensions of this relationship with a particular focus on Pentecostals in the U.S. and Africa. The first aspect that Comaroff explores is the sociological. In that neoliberalism is undermining certain social-economic-political roles of the nation-state, Pentecostalism has been highly successful in appropriating these roles with theocratic intentions. Secondly, Comaroff identifies an ontological aspect: “many born-again faiths strive to counter relativism and a crisis of meaning by offering cogent orders of fixed referents and absolute truths” (2009:24). Finally, Comaroff identifies a pragmatic aspect in that in many ways these movements “mimic the creative forms of the market” (2009:24). Throughout this essay, one can see clearly how Comaroff attributes the success of Pentecostalism to conditions of anomie and deprivation.

Another example of an anthropologist making use of theories of modernity in the study of Pentecostalism is Birgit Meyer's (1998) analysis of Pentecostalism among the Peki Ewe in Ghana. Meyer (2004:447) is an anthropologist affiliated with the Research Centre Religion and Society at the University of Amsterdam. Though several of Meyer's works contain similar themes, a review of her article, "Make a Complete Break with the Past," will be sufficient here (see also, 1999, 2002). As indicated by the title, Meyer's (1998) essay revolves around a longing that Ghanaian Pentecostals frequently express to 'make a complete break with the past.' Through this statement she examines Pentecostalist discourse in Ghana concerning modernity and tradition in the context of postcolonialism. As she argues, "pentecostalist discourse takes up the language of modernity" and a "clear analogy exists between the pentecostalist...conceptualization of conversion in terms of a rupture with the past and modernity's self definition in terms of progress and continuous renewal" (1998:317). This relationship is situated within a colonial history, wherein conversion to traditional Protestantism was presented as an alternative choice to conversion to modernity (both implying a rejection of tradition), and a postcolonial present, where there is a push by the government for a return to tradition. This being the case, Meyer argues that Ghanaians are "ambivalent" towards modernity (1998:318). Accordingly, Meyer's argument focuses "on believers' inability to make a complete break with what they conceptualize as 'the past' and to become 'free' modern subjects, and on how pentecostalism allows them to address their ambivalent stance towards modernity" (1998:318). As she succinctly states, "in advocating a 'complete break with the past,' pentecostalists define themselves in opposition to groups in society which strive to overcome the ruptures brought about by colonialism in general and missionization in particular" (1998:326). This being the case, Pentecostalists clash with those in Ghana who want to overcome the colonial

rupture by revitalizing tradition, connecting the past and the present. In this example, we can see how Pentecostalism is characterized as a space wherein the conditions of modernity are negotiated.

Globalization

Recently, globalization theory, or transnationalism as some prefer it, has shifted to the forefront of many studies (e.g., Coleman 2000; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Droogers 2001; Robbins 2004b). Before reviewing some of these works, it is worth mentioning that globalization theories share some in common with those that emphasize modernity: one takes modernity as the wider context that informs local traditions (anthropologists tend to use the term, ‘modernities,’ to emphasize the variation in this process), the other explores the relationship between global processes and local communities (cf. Brodwin 2003:87; Englund and Leach 2000). On another note, Coleman makes the useful distinction between what he considers two “theoretical tendencies” in the social scientific literature on global religious movements (2002:9). First, there are those that present them “as a fairly unreconstructed form of Americanisation and/or Westernisation,” or as a transmission in a one-way, linear fashion between the Western and non-Western world (2002:9). Secondly, and more recently, there are those with a theoretical tendency towards globalization who emphasize a non-linear, two-way flow of influence. According to Coleman, they have “a more chaotic vision of cultural creation and transmission” and “emphasize the importance of local interpretations, transformations, and sites of cultural production” (2002:11). I will review several works that take globalization as their frame of reference to illustrate the various ways that these ideas are being used to understand Pentecostalism. As mentioned above, anthropologists generally view the local as a place where

global processes—the global and transnational flows of people, goods and ideas—are fleshed out, although others may be more likely to talk about how Pentecostalism promotes the globalizing process. Through these examples it will also become clearer how globalization theories differ from modernization theories. In the former, it seems, some emphasize a sort of Pentecostal global identity engaged with a local identity (some view it the other way around); in the latter, as we saw, the emphasis seemed to be on a condition of modernity within which Pentecostals find themselves.

Beginning in Ghana and the Netherlands, an article by Rijk van Dijk (2002:65), an anthropologist affiliated with the African Studies Centre in the Netherlands, serves as an example of a study that explicitly intends to contribute to the study of the relationship between globalization and Pentecostalism. In particular, he is interested in examining whether it is justifiable to characterize Pentecostalism as “globalisation *par excellence*” as some have thought it to be (2002:50). He bases his analysis on the comparison of Pentecostalism in Ghana with Ghanaian migrant communities in the Netherlands. Van Dijk argues that although Pentecostalism seems to globalize its characteristics, in this case individualism, with relative ease, there is more to the story. Despite the transnational nature of Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, he maintains that it is still useful to use the phrase “Ghanaian Pentecostalism,” not because it remains “local and cultural,” but because “in many ways Ghanaian Pentecostalism has engaged with the global in an attempt to generate a critical distance from the local and some of its cultural traditions” (2002:52). In order to illustrate this, he provides an example from a Ghanaian Pentecostal prayer camp. Instead of interpreting the world as consisting of global flows, Ghanaian Pentecostals perceive it as a series of obstacles to achieving prosperity that need to be overcome, primarily through the deliverance ritual. This ritual does encourage

individualism by emphasizing rupture from family and tradition, but van Dijk is interested in what kind of individuality and whether or not it could be considered individualism at all. In considering Pentecostalism among the Ghanaian Diaspora in the Netherlands, van Dijk argues that it would appear that community was created through the religion rather than Western individualism. In his analysis, he suggests that these differences are due to the formation of two different forms of identity based on different contextual needs. In the end, what became evident through this study was that these “Pentecostal churches see themselves as controlled neither by the local nor the global, at least where its creation of individual identities is concerned” (2002:62).

Moving to New Ireland, Richard Eves (2000) also considers Pentecostalism in the context of the relationship between the global and the local. Eves’ paper, based on fieldwork among the Lelet in New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, discusses how the ‘new’ context of the global—in the form of premillennialist Pentecostalism—frames the understanding of the local in New Ireland in ways that orthodox Christianity did not. His main argument is that the global does not take over the local but rather serves as a broad framework of reference resulting in a dialectic between the two. This is in contrast to, as he reviews, literature that has emphasized one-directional, locally homogenizing forms of globalization or modernization (they are used somewhat interchangeably in this paper). Nonetheless, Pentecostalism in Eves’ account brings the global to New Ireland in new ways. To illustrate this process Eves discusses the events surrounding an extreme drought and how this local event came to be interpreted in global eschatological terms. Eves argues that this presents an instance where local epistemology engaged with events and ideas that “flowed from the outside” (2000:87). However, Eves also stresses that these global explanations were not accepted without conflict by the Lelet: “the

conclusion that the drought constituted a sign of the end-times was not one that was reached rapidly or unproblematically” and “it was only after local frameworks of meaning failed to explain the drought that people sought other interpretations” (2000:87). To sum, in Eves’ account Pentecostalism is a source for global flows of ideas that are negotiated locally.

There is another, related way in which globalization has served as a frame of reference for anthropological studies of Pentecostalism. As Droogers (2001) argues, though most studies have focused on the “external” features that might explain Pentecostalism’s global success—such as anomie resulting from the modernization process—anthropologists need to examine the “internal” features of Pentecostalism as a religion that articulate well with an increasingly globalized world. What Droogers is interested in discovering is what is peculiar about Pentecostalism itself that makes it so successful. For him, maybe Pentecostalism’s particular characteristics are what make it uniquely successful in a globalized world rather than only the globalized world itself.

As Droogers explains it, globalization as a framework is a view that holds that “the world is experienced as a single place” that also has a “shadow world” (2001:51). Therefore, there is also “often talk of a tension between the universal and the particular, the global and the local, the whole and the fragments, and this has led to terms such as ‘glocalisation’” (2001:51). For example, one aspect that has been emphasized along these lines is the blurring of national boundaries and the growth of a transnational consciousness. Turning to the internal features of Pentecostalism, Droogers suggests they can be usefully discussed in terms of commonality and diversity. On the one hand, common features that Pentecostals share despite apparent diversity are the belief in the presence and experience of the Holy Spirit along with associated gifts of the Spirit, the conversion experience, and the duality of the Pentecostal world-view. Despite these

shared features, Pentecostalism is still characterized by historical, organizational, and political diversity, diversity in attitudes towards other Christians, and finally, what he calls “Pentecostalism’s capacity for the paradoxical combination of opposite characteristics” (2001:48). In his view, all of this combined forms “a constellation” that “make[s] Pentecostalism a religion that fits with the globalising world” (2001:54). In a way, the features of Pentecostal commonality serve individual and social needs peculiar to a globalized world while Pentecostal diversity, as Droogers states, helps “to bridge the gap between the global and the local” (2001:57).

Pentecostal Ritual

Here, I would like to turn the discussion to locating Holy Spirit possession in the context of Pentecostal ritual. What seem to be lacking in the literature reviewed above are analyses of Pentecostal ritual (notable exceptions are Csordas’ 1994, 1993, 1997 works on the Catholic Charismatic Movement in New England). Even though Pentecostals place great emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit, anthropologists have been primarily concerned with Pentecostalism’s relationship to modernity, globalization, neoliberalism, etc., largely because of their desire to explain its growth. Making his own case for a need to examine the internal features of Pentecostalism that contribute to its success in the globalizing world (finding inspiration in Droogers’ 2001 argument outlined above), Robbins makes the following observation:

Another factor in [Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity’s] success often underplayed in deprivation and disorganization accounts is the appeal of its ritual life.... [Church services] have an eventful quality, with people waiting to see what the Spirit will do..., and they often erase older boundaries between worship and leisure.... Many people are compelled to attend services, revivals, and other ritualized gatherings by a ‘spiritual acquisitiveness’ generated in them that presses

believers “relentlessly on to the next experience”.... These ecstatic rituals clearly are, in part, a counterpoint to the ascetic lives converts are enjoined to live outside of religious contexts, and their structures frequently reiterate the alternation of control and release.... Further examination of [Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity] ritual life...would be valuable. *Yet despite its widely acknowledged importance, detailed study of [Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity] ritual is notably scarce in the literature. From an anthropological perspective, it represents probably the greatest lacuna in the work done thus far.* [Robbins 2004b:126, emphasis added]

Elsewhere, Robbins (2009) further elaborates on Pentecostal ritual. As he argues, anthropologists have largely ignored ritual in the Pentecostal context partly because Pentecostals outright reject or are reluctant to use the term themselves. However, Robbins argues that ritual is in fact a justifiable term used in the Pentecostal context and illustrates it with several examples. It is worth reviewing how Robbins makes his argument:

To begin with, if we look carefully, we will see that Pentecostal antiritualism is...itself ritualized. Moreover, to an observer with an eye trained only on Pentecostalism’s social aspect, rather than on the fine points of its folk theology, it is hard to miss how much of what Pentecostals do with each other easily counts as ritual in terms of its formulaic quality and its directness toward divinity—and this is true even if the forms in question allow for a good deal of spontaneous elaboration of personal content in approaching the divine. [Robbins 2009:59]

Based upon these observations, Robbins mentions such acts as individual and communal prayer, individual and communal periods of worship, and Sunday morning services that could be extended as examples of Pentecostal ritual.

Here, Robbins’ (2009) main goal is to address the question of how Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity has been so successful in parts of the world where neoliberalism has restricted other institutions’ abilities to survive. In this context, Robbins suggests that the Pentecostal emphasis on the role of ritual in social interaction and daily life is the impetus for social productivity, which is central to the institution-building aspect of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. Though not elaborated on by Robbins, rituals surrounding the Holy

Spirit (whether possession, prayer, conversation, healing, etc.) appear to be central to Pentecostal success. It is to the Pentecostal rituals surrounding Holy Spirit possession, through an exploration of three case studies, that I turn to next.

CHAPTER 3

HOLY SPIRIT POSSESSION AMONG JAMAICAN, PEKI EWE AND URAPMIN PENTECOSTALS

Holy Spirit Possession in Jamaican Pentecostalism

In this chapter, I will review Holy Spirit possession as practiced by Jamaican, Peki Ewe and Urapmin Pentecostals. The first case study comes from Diane J. Austin-Broos' (1997) *Jamaica Genesis*, a study of religious discourse in Jamaica. For Austin-Broos, Pentecostalism in Jamaica is a form of revival religion that is truly a Jamaican Pentecostalism, that is, it has been made Jamaican through its use. It is worth reviewing how she describes the local and regional conditions in Jamaica that form the context for Pentecostalism before I discuss its local features and characteristics of Holy Spirit possession. At the end, I will briefly introduce Austin-Broos' analysis of Pentecostalism in Jamaica.

The Context of Jamaican Pentecostalism

Austin-Broos embeds her discussion of religious discourse in Jamaica within a particular history of European, African, Caribbean and North American confluence. Jamaicans who are now Pentecostals come from a history of ex-slaves living in a social and racial order that is the remnant of British colonialism, meeting shifting structural and power relationships during the decades leading up to the 20th century on a regional level as the United States gained increasing influence over the region. This dynamic resulted in rapid ideological, economic, political, and social changes in the black Jamaican lower-classes, who are predominantly marginalized by society and poor, with Pentecostalism being one revitalistic response that made an entry into

Jamaica during the 1920s and 1930s (along with nationalism, unionism, Rastafarianism, and Zionism) (22-33).

Within this social and economic order, Pentecostalism is also engaged with a Jamaican worldview that is the product of the proselytizing efforts of European Christian missionaries mixed with the indigenous religions of slaves brought from Africa. For the European contribution, we see that:

Sectarian missionaries to Jamaica brought a sense of Christian redemption from the perennial state of sin. This was a sense of sin located in the person and addressed through moral discipline that allowed transcendence only in death. The Christian cosmology, anchored in God, presented an ontology in which evil was located in the person and addressed by moral discipline and rite. [Austin-Broos 1997:6]

On the other hand, “Caribbean ideas of ‘foolishness’ and ‘play,’ the aura of the trickster persona, were antipathetic to the Christian self” and “the religions of West Africa brought a cosmology in which a multiplicity of spiritual forces, including ancestral living-dead, pervaded and defined the world” (1997:6). Therefore, the Jamaican cosmology that Pentecostalism engages with is characterized by a tension between the idea that sin is located within the person that must be dealt with through moral discipline—derived from Christianity—and the idea that good and evil can reside ambivalently together and that the playful use of the trick might relieve a person of having to seriously reflect on the person, thereby being “eudemonic”—derived from West Africa (1997:7).

Though there is variation in Pentecostal doctrine in Jamaica, Austin-Broos documents some general observations. In Jamaican Pentecostalism there is an emphasis on Jesus in terms of a personal relationship and Jesus as redeemer. Also, Jamaican Pentecostals tend to focus on personal change rather than social change. In regards to conversion, there is an emphasis on a two-stage progression of conversion followed by either a process or moment of “sanctification”

through the medium of the Holy Spirit (through baptism), which is legitimized by the presence of glossolalia (sometimes understood as xenoglossy). We also see mainly male pastors with predominantly female congregations. The pursuit of healing and the desire for ritual purity is also an important recurring feature. In fact, it is through healing that the believer becomes ritually clean and therefore able to be possessed by the Holy Spirit (7-19).

Holy Spirit Possession among Jamaican Pentecostals

With this, we can now turn to examining the role of the Holy Spirit and Holy Spirit possession for Jamaican Pentecostals. To begin, Austin-Broos points out that, for a majority of Jamaicans, they “live in a world informed by God” within which the “Holy Spirit and Jesus are the protagonists” (1997:17). Conversion and healing begins the process that makes the Pentecostal ritually clean, enabling them to be possessed by the Holy Spirit and progress towards becoming a saint. As Austin-Broos states, “although Jamaican Pentecostals must strive through daily practice to be holy, it is magical possession by the Holy Ghost that actually makes a believer a saint, one who can aspire to a sinless life” (1997:34). Though the processes of being possessed by the Holy Spirit can vary according to the individual, the following can serve as a general guideline. First, there is recognition by the individual that life stressors and misfortune are divine “retribution” for being associated with sin, which ultimately the Devil is accountable for. The only way to become sinless is to prepare one’s body for possession and to go through the process of conversion and sanctification (135). Following a water baptism that marks salvation, an individual may immediately become possessed by the Holy Spirit and experience sanctification while some go through a period of “tarrying” (marked by prayer or fasting) in order to become an acceptable “vessel for the Spirit” (1997:137). The rituals of conversion and

possession are described by the believer “as a moment of transformation, an instantaneous and total reclamation of the human body by the Holy Ghost” (1997:140). And, the event of Holy Spirit possession for Jamaican Pentecostals is accompanied by glossolalia as the prime indicator of its authenticity, though other bodily movements may accompany it as well. After the initial possession, the Holy Spirit is thought to remain as a form of empowerment to maintain a moral life, without which this would be impossible, though “backsliding” may remain a persistent problem for some believers. There is also a distinction between the initial possession, which remains as a part of the individual’s conception of personhood, and later experiences of “full in-filling” as special moments of intensified interaction with the Holy Spirit (1997:143).

Holy Spirit Possession and Gender. Along with these general characteristics of Holy Spirit possession in Jamaican Pentecostalism it appears also that there are gendered differences. There are several examples of this in Austin-Broos’ account. In the events leading up to conversion, during a church service when an individual begins to acknowledge that misfortune is the result of sin, a woman often will feel a pain in her “belly” that represents the conflict going on between the Devil and the Holy Spirit as well an indication of her condition as an unclean vessel (1997:136). One of the primary sources of uncleanness for women is sex since they are believed to be affected more by this than are men (140). In regards to the actual experience of possession as Austin-Broos describes it, “women have a strong sense that in-filling involves entry of the Spirit through the vagina—a process not described as such but sometimes signaled by tapping the abdomen. The Spirit fills the cavity of the belly, now cleansed of unsanctified semen, and moves up to the heart in order to revivify the soul” (1997:146). Whereas sex stands in the way of Holy Spirit possession for women, for men cigarette smoking is often thought to

make one unclean (140). In contrast to the metaphor of the body being a vessel that the Holy Spirit fills as women perceive it, men make use of ‘circumcision of the heart’ imagery: “this image of the circumcision of the heart is very often associated by Jamaican Pentecostals with the idea that in the possession of the Holy Spirit, they are infused with the breath of God that becomes the cleansing blood of Christ. This sacrificial blood circumcises the heart by ‘cutting’ it and washing it clean” (1997:148). Though these metaphors can be used somewhat interchangeably by men and women to articulate the experience and function of Holy Spirit possession they do represent gendered differences.

Holy Spirit Possession and Race. Another aspect of Holy Spirit possession in Jamaica is that it serves to invert the social and racial hierarchy that marginalizes “the black and poor as superstitious immoralists” (1997:116). Since possession by the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues as a sign of its authenticity, declares an individual moral, the Pentecostal gains access into a moral space they were once excluded from. Nonetheless, along with the socio-racial hierarchy that still exists in Jamaica, Austin-Broos also documents racism and discrimination within the Pentecostal movement as it originates from the United States (see, e.g. pp. 114-116).

Holy Spirit Possession and the Politics of Local Religions. According to Austin-Broos, there is an antagonism between Pentecostals and members of the Jamaican Zion Revival despite the fact that these two groups are sometimes grouped together by outsiders, thinking that they comprise the same religion, and are both marginalized as “poor and ‘ignorant’” (1997:18). The Zion Revival is a revival movement that is a syncretistic blend of African indigenous religions and Baptist Christianity with roots in the mid-19th century in Jamaica. Though it is considered

unorthodox Christianity, it maintains many similarities to Pentecostalism in regards to ritual and belief. In regards to Holy Spirit possession, the Revivalists maintain that possession by the Holy Spirit (who is imagined to be red) cleans and redeems the believer, with Jesus and God playing more superfluous roles, and that this initial possession paves the way for further possession by prominent biblical figures (Old Testament prophets, New Testament apostles, archangels, etc.) who become a source of empowerment, protection, and healing (63). Much of the Revivalist belief and practice involves healing aspirations and rites for the “biomoral malaise” that is the result of sin (1997:71). According to Pentecostals, neighboring members of the Zion Revival do not possess the Holy Spirit because they do not demonstrate glossolalia and therefore authentic salvation is contested. In fact, early and modern forms of Pentecostalism in Jamaica have engaged with this “discourse of creole religion” concerning authentic morality (1997:116). For the Pentecostal, proper morality is also achieved through Holy Spirit possession to the end of eventually becoming a saint, though structured differently, and it could be argued that the two have mutually informed one another.

Austin-Broos’ Analysis

In Austin-Broos’ analysis, the context within which Pentecostalism is found in Jamaica is characterized by what she refers to as a “politics of moral orders” (1997:7). By this she is emphasizing that within this particular context (former slaves, racial hierarchies, the remnants of proselytizing missionaries, etc.) the notion of ‘what is moral’ was and is highly contested as Jamaicans took the Christian message and reinterpreted it within their own ‘creole’ framework. Central to her analysis, drawing on practice theory, is how Pentecostalism helps Jamaican’s “constitute themselves as subjects” while at the same time acknowledging that “Pentecostals do

not...escape the 'coercive dimensions of society' or even, in a bodily sense, the inscriptions of the dominant order" (1997:10). Therefore, within a dominant social and racial order, within which Jamaican Pentecostals find themselves, which conditions their religious experience, and where the notion of what is moral is continually contested, Pentecostalism enables them to "sustain themselves through modes of representation and practice that can mediate, criticize, or reinforce the larger orders of dominance" (1997:12). For example, in the racial hierarchy lower-class black Jamaicans were considered immoral because they were not able to marry. However, as Pentecostalism entered Jamaica, emanating from the United States in the early 20th century, black Jamaicans found an entry into this circumscribed moral arena. Therefore, the ability to marry served to allow "Jamaicans to circumvent aspects of the British order" (1997:8) and establish themselves as subjects in this moral order while at the same time being "practically effective in building Pentecostalism's church organizations" (1997:11).

Holy Spirit possession as cast within Austin-Broos' framework can be seen as the space where the politics of moral orders are waged. Pentecostalism in Jamaica is one that negotiates the space between opposing moral orders, a space wherein Jamaicans can address, confirm, invert, or succumb to local concerns over race, social status, and gender. If this is the case, then Holy Spirit possession may be central to these concerns in that it legitimizes and makes authentic their entry into accepted moral orders as well as creates a space for them to participate in local and global society on their own terms with authority conferred upon them by God.

Holy Spirit Possession in Peki Ewe Pentecostalism

The second case study that will be examined is Birgit Meyer's (1999) *Translating the Devil*. As with the Jamaican case above, I will give a brief overview of the historical and

cultural context of Pentecostalism among the Peki Ewe, as provided by the author, before moving on to local aspects of practice and belief. And again, I will finish with a brief overview of Meyer's analysis.

The Context of Peki Ewe Pentecostalism

To begin with a brief introduction to their traditional culture, the Ewe, an ethnic group living in Ghana, were traditionally patrilineally and patrilocally organized, relied on small-scale farming with some hunting or fishing for subsistence, and their society exhibited some economic and political stratification. In contrast to their regional neighbors who were integrated into Kingdoms at the start of colonization (e.g., the Asante), the Ewe consisted of small independent states. The Peki Ewe is a designation for one of these groups who are the primary people that Meyer's monograph considers (1-8).

Traditional Ewe Religion. A brief summary of Meyer's historical reconstruction of the traditional religion of the Peki Ewe should be useful to contextualize the local Pentecostalism that will be introduced below. To begin, there was no Ewe word for religion, and because it appears to have been unorganized and inconsistent, Meyer claims that "non-Christian Ewe evidently felt no need for a consistent cosmology" (1999:65). Though polytheistic, *Mawu* (this is now the name for the Christian God as well) was the name for the creator-deity who was thought to be distant and uninvolved in everyday affairs. Rather, people would address ambivalent gods, called the *trɔ̃wo*, who were associated with certain places or duties and who could be accessed through a priest. The Peki Ewe mainly addressed Wuve and Amimli, though each town and clan might have a deity of their own. Each *trɔ̃* was served by a priest, who was

sometimes selected by the god through possession, as well as multiple priestesses who acted as wives for the god. The difference in possession by the god between the priest and priestesses is that the priest was usually only possessed at the start of his role as priest but the priestesses would continue to be possessed on a regular basis. The later included mental and physical disassociation as the women acted as conduits for the *trɔ̃* (67-68). As Meyer states, “possession and dance were indispensable elements of Ewe religion, by which the gods were present in the visible world. The female body was thus an instrument of divine expression” (1999:68). This brief sketch of Ewe religion, cursory as it is, contributes to the following discussion in that missionaries demonized Ewe traditional beliefs and gods whereby the Devil became the source of the *trɔ̃wo* (84). Importantly, there has continued to be a tension between this indigenous religion and Pentecostalism among the Peki Ewe. The only way for the Ewe Pentecostal to be delivered from the power of the evil spirits is now through Holy Spirit possession. However, before continuing with this theme I will briefly introduce colonization and Christianization as further context for Ewe Pentecostalism.

Change Through Colonization and Christianization. As Meyer (1999:1-8) recounts, the Peki Ewe came under British rule as early as 1847 as part of a British Protectorate and formal rule was recognized in 1898 as part of the newly established British colony of the Gold Coast. During this time, young men began to abandon traditional subsistence and economic strategies to work in mines or on plantations and cocoa farming became the Peki Ewe’s means of access to the market economy. The standard of living for the Peki Ewe was relatively good even through the inter-World War period in the first half of the 20th century and Meyer notes that this was a time of relative prosperity. However, the Second World War along with disease (associated with

the cocoa plants) intervened and the standard of living began to decline. When Ghana's independence came during the mid-20th century, without the British Administration there was little political organization, cocoa cultivation had come to an end, and migrant labor became the only reasonable source of income (15-19). This sets the context for the rapid rise in both Pentecostalism and indigenous religions in Ghana in the last decades of the 20th century (xix, 117). During the time of Meyer's fieldwork (between 1988 and 1992), Peki Ewe tended to work in Accra, continue with subsistence farming, or participate in minor trading. Villages are still divided into clan areas that are grouped patrilineally with households containing either nuclear or extended families (25). Poverty remains the rule since the decline of cocoa farming.

Christianity began to be introduced to the Peki Ewe beginning in 1847. Meyer reports that the particular strain of Christianity brought by the first missionaries was part of the German Pietist tradition, which is a form of orthodox Protestantism that "combined a focus on the inner with an extremely strict and sober way of life" (1999:30). Though the missionaries tried to instill a sense of indwelling sin within the Ewe that is the responsibility of the individual, the Ewe did not take fully to this and attributed evil ultimately to the Devil rather than to personal sin. In fact, Meyer notes that "like non-Christians, Ewe Christians understood sin...primarily as something endured, rather than committed by themselves" (1999:102). And furthermore, "ever since the beginning of Christianisation, the ideas held by most Ewe Christians differed considerably from those of the missionaries" and "almost 150 years after the arrival of the first missionary, most church members still conceptualise non-Christian spiritual beings in the same way as the first converts" (1999:138). By the beginning of the 20th century, several orthodox churches were established among the Ewe, including Presbyterian and Evangelical churches, followed by several other denominations (20-22). In Meyer's view, the Ewe initially converted

to Christianity for practical reasons: the “Christian religion was attractive because it offered the material means to achieve a prosperous and relatively high position in colonial society” (1999:11). However, since women played a more prominent role in the indigenous religion, fewer women were inclined to convert because Christianity did not offer similar space for participation (14).

Peki Ewe Pentecostalism. It is within this context of German Pietism that Pentecostalism developed. Meyer (1999:46) places Pentecostalism as emerging from a particular Pietist practice of healing and exorcism, which had established within the Ewe community the notion of the Devil and possession by evil spirits. By the 1960s, through rifts in the orthodox churches, Pentecostal churches began to be established and quickly became more successful than the mission churches. They began as prayer groups of other churches that practiced healing, glossolalia, and dealing directly with evil spirits. These early Pentecostal movements were looked at with suspicion by Peki Ewe who participated in traditional religion as well as those who were members of the orthodox churches. Though variations exist in the churches that are Holy Spirit-centered, the primary focus of these churches revolves around deliverance through possession by the Holy Spirit (112-113). Typically, as with the Jamaican case, pastors tend to be male with women making up the majority of the congregations. As an example, in one of the churches where Meyer conducted fieldwork, there were thirty-six men compared to one hundred forty-three women (131). Moreover, members of these churches tend to be very active in comparison to neighboring Protestant churches. Finally, there is a noticeable lack of glossolalia in Meyer’s account when compared to Austin-Broos’ (1997).

Holy Spirit Possession among Peki Ewe Pentecostals

Whereas Austin-Broos (1997) speaks of Holy Spirit possession in relation to morality and healing, Meyer (1999) shows that the Ghanaian emphasis is overwhelmingly on deliverance as well as healing. The activity of Holy Spirit possession among the Peki Ewe indicates that one has been delivered from evil spirits and is protected. The nature spirits, gods and ancestors of the traditional Ewe religion have been demonized by the Pentecostals, and it is these entities that continuously afflict Pentecostals and from whom they seek deliverance. The central figure in the deliverance ritual is the Holy Spirit, a phrase that did not exist before missionization, whose name invokes imagery of 'breath' and is the primary source of authority for the Peki Ewe Pentecostal (even above the Bible) and evidence of a present God (136).

In a Peki Ewe Pentecostal church much time is devoted to healing and deliverance. The world that they live in is characterized as the battlefield in a war between God and the Devil. If a Pentecostal suffers from physical or mental affliction it is attributed to have come from contact with traditional spirits or otherwise succumbing to tradition in some way. The following is an example of a typical process in discovering the source of the affliction that takes place during prayer sessions with the ritual of laying on of hands:

It is believed that the pastor and his assistants are not only containers of the Holy Spirit, but can also function as his brokers. At the moment when the pastor and his assistants place their hands on the heads of those standing before them, the Holy Spirit residing in the former enters the latter. In this way, people are 'loaded' with heavenly power. However, the laying on of hands may also result in uncontrolled reactions. Once this happens, it is taken as a sign of severe spirit possession, because it is also believed that once a possessed person is connected to the Holy Spirit, the power controlling him or her feels offended and aggressively tries to keep hold of its host. [Meyer 1999:158]

Through baptism one is released from possession by evil spirits but not permanently. Another aspect is that they must seek Holy Spirit possession on a regular basis through prayer or they leave themselves open to evil spirits (145).

Holy Spirit Possession and Gender. As with the Jamaican case, here we also see that there are gendered differences in the experience of Holy Spirit possession, which is clearly tied to social organization and gender status and stratification. Among the Peki Ewe, Meyer (1999:185) notes that many more women seek deliverance than men. According to some men, this is because women are spiritually weak; according to most women, their increased access to Holy Spirit possession is a sign of being more spiritual. In Meyer's analysis, because of the patrilineal-patrilocal organization of Peki Ewe society, women are more likely to be cut off from familial ties. This being the case, deliverance from traditional spirits (which is often the family *trɔ̃*) serves to dissolve blood ties and affirm their position in society (187).

Holy Spirit Possession and the Politics of Local Religions. There is an explicit rejection of traditional culture and a demonization of traditional religion by the Peki Ewe Pentecostals. Though they reject traditional religion, they are continuously engaged with it through deliverance rituals. These two traditions in Ghana, the indigenous Spiritual churches and the Pentecostal churches, are engaged in a mutually informing dialogue with one another. According to the Pentecostals, the expansion of the Spiritual churches during the 1990s with their involvement with healing and possession through traditional means is evidence of increasing demonic activity (177). Within Ghana, moreover, there is currently a push by the government for a return to tradition as an attempt to move past colonialism and post-colonialism by making a

connection to the past (Meyer 1998). As Meyer claims, “in advocating a ‘complete break with the past,’ pentecostals define themselves in opposition to groups in society which strive to overcome the ruptures brought about by colonialism in general and missionization in particular” (1998:326). Despite their longing to leave the past behind, they are still immersed in a local culture where many strive to maintain or energize tradition thereby creating an environment where Pentecostal deliverance is in continual demand.

Meyer’s Analysis

Meyer’s analysis of Pentecostalism among the Peki Ewe lies in the ambivalence to modernity. In her view, Pentecostalism creates a space wherein they can negotiate this ambivalence and is seen as being particularly successful in making its followers able to negotiate the modern condition (introduced by colonialism, capitalism, and Protestantism) in their own localized context. For Meyer, an “encounter with modernity...gives rise to beliefs and practices centered on new occult forces” and this intensification of Devil imagery among the Peki Ewe is symptomatic of the social distress introduced by these forces (1999:xxii).

Holy Spirit possession can be seen as the locus of this struggle. Among the Peki Ewe, the process of identifying the source of distress, deliverance, and possession by the Holy Spirit allows them to negotiate their position on the boundary between powerful regimes of meaning.

In Meyer’s words:

In this way, members are enabled to mediate between indigenous attitudes towards spirits and Christianity and at the same time face the contradiction that their daily lives actually fit with neither indigenous nor modern nor Christian ideals. Pentecostalism, rather than representing a safe haven of modern religion in which people permanently remain, enables people to move back and forth between the way of life they (wish to) have left behind and the one to which they aspire. Pentecostalism provides a bridge between individualistic and family-

centered concerns and allows people to express and reflect upon the tensions between both. [Meyer 1999:212]

Holy Spirit possession, then, allows the believer to engage meaningfully with the tradition that they are still immersed in while at the same time strive towards individuality and conceptions of the modern self. On a practical level, due to poor living conditions and social and economic inequality, Holy Spirit possession is a tangible way to engage with one's situation. As Meyer points out, most Pentecostals are women living in or close to poverty, many of whom also struggle to support a family, or men who lack the means to marry or otherwise participate in society. Pentecostal ritual acts as a sort of litmus test wherein contact with the divine is capable of exposing what is causing the social, economic, physical, etc. affliction as well as a source of remedy and resolution (178).

Holy Spirit Possession in Urapmin Pentecostalism

The final case study that will be examined at length comes from Joel Robbins' (2004a) *Becoming Sinners*, a study of cultural change among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. Similar to the accounts above, I will introduce aspects of Urapmin society—cultural change through colonization, Christianization and revivalism as framed by Robbins—before discussing Holy Spirit possession in this community. Moreover, I will briefly introduce Robbins' theoretical orientation that guides his discussion.

The Context of Urapmin Pentecostalism

The Urapmin are a community of about 390 people located in the West Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea. Though they are geographically divided into two main communities (an upper and a lower), they do not make much of this distinction themselves. Culturally, the

Urapmin are related to several ethnic groups living in the Min region. The ethnic groups that inhabit this region, including the Urapmin, each possessed their own rituals and religious beliefs, though each are understood by the ethnic groups to be related to each other, comprising a “Min regional ritual system” (Robbins 2004a:17). Pre-colonization, the Urapmin resided in a high position in the hierarchy that made up this regional ritual system.

Socially, the village is very important organizationally, with kinship ties playing a more minor role. The Urapmin are organized within villages into clan-like groups though kinship is recognized cognatically. The Urapmin also practice group endogamy and a post-marital residence rule of ambilocality (21-24). All of this creates a situation, as Robbins notes, where “Urapmin patterns of social grouping are constantly changing, and even when they appear momentarily stable, everyone knows they remain subject to change at any time” (2004a:25). Moreover, the Urapmin are subsistence farmers and place great importance on reciprocal exchange in establishing and maintaining social relationships. Big men play an important role in contributing to the proper functioning of the village (204). Finally, Robbins argues that the term “relational” best describes the Urapmin, who, along with Melanesian cultures in general, “neither recognize the autonomous individual nor the social whole” (2004a:292).

Change Through Colonization and the Introduction of Christianity. The Urapmin did not encounter colonial rule until the mid-20th century and they remained relatively isolated from European influence up until that time. According to Robbins (2004:47), colonialism was a time that the Urapmin say they received the law, meaning both Western institutions and Christianity. During this time they took up these institutions but still maintained control over them (49). Robbins states that the Australian colonial administrators were interested in mainly two things in

the Min region: establishing law and getting the Urapmin to abandon reciprocity for a market economy (53). However, the Urapmin never really took to the latter (73-83). In fact, the influence of colonialism seems to be relatively minor in regards to social organization and economy; they still continue with subsistence farming and have not been made poor by the market economy (314). It seems that colonialism had two main effects on the Urapmin. First, it disrupted the Min region ritual system and contributed to their marginalization on a regional basis due to their particular geographic position in comparison to other groups. This marginalization continued after independence, which came in 1975 (18). Secondly, colonialism brought Christianity.

Interestingly, the Urapmin were never directly missionized. Nonetheless, Robbins notes that they were eager to become Christians (83). The Urapmin first came into contact with Christianity in the early 1960s. As introduced above, the Urapmin had slowly lost regional status, due to the reordering of the regional structure during colonial times, and they became increasingly dependent on neighboring groups that were once lower in the hierarchy; they even learned Christianity from them (99). According to Robbins, “Christianity began offering the Urapmin opportunities to regain a sense of regional importance and find roles for themselves within the new order” (2004a:102). The original Christian influence came through the Australian Baptist Missionary Society that had established a mission in a neighboring group. They emphasized the demonization of local tradition and medical/economic development (103-104). Young Urapmin men travelled to the mission and brought Christianity back with them, where a school was established and quickly run by the community. Robbins notes that the Urapmin gave their all to Christian development rather than to the market economy (119). One major change that came through Christianity was that it challenged Urapmin relationalism,

which Robbins attributes to the “unrelentingly individualist” nature of Christianity with its “insistence on the individual as the sole unit of divine judgment” (2004a:293).

Urapmin Pentecostalism. Despite the initial popularity of Christianity among the Urapmin, it “was fully embraced only when it became, through the office of the Holy Spirit, an indigenous possession” (Robbins 2004a:83). This took place during the last quarter of the 20th century when many ethnic groups in the Min region experienced revivalism in the form of charismatic Christianity. This revivalism was characterized by “waves of healing, prophecy, visions, tongue speaking, and other ecstatic phenomena that their members interpreted as outpourings of the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (2004a:122). The Min revival began with a man named Diyos, a Min region pastor, who learned of revivals taking place elsewhere while in Australia. He began to have a series of visions and established a Bible college in the Min region, claiming inspiration and authority directly from God. During one meeting, Diyos and his congregation became possessed by the Holy Spirit, and Urapmin who had gone to see what was happening brought the revival home with them. Within three days, many of the Urapmin became possessed by the Holy Spirit, and by 1978, the entire Urapmin community was Pentecostal.

Robbins outlines several characteristics of the Urapmin form of Pentecostal Christianity. His most succinct definition is that it is “a recognizably Western form of Christianity focused on the revivalist and charismatic themes of the need for a conviction of human sinfulness to accompany conversion, the role of the Holy Spirit in helping converts to address their sinful nature, and the potential imminence of the Second Coming” (2004a:2). For the Urapmin, pastoral authority now came through the Holy Spirit rather than from their relationship to the

mission and there was a complete movement away from the mission to a local one (122-123). Similar to Meyer's (1999) account, we also see that Urapmin traditional religion and Urapmin ancestors were demonized (Robbins 2004a:148). Tradition is considered to be standing in the way of a moral life and when Urapmin "honor the indigenous system they fail its Christian counterpart as evidence of their propensity to sin" (2004a:xxvi). Along with emphasis on sin and the activity of the Holy Spirit, the Urapmin also dwell on the Second Coming and rejecting the world that they live in (307). The Urapmin maintain that the Second Coming of Jesus could happen at any moment and believe that they must be without sin when this event occurs. As Robbins notes, their type of millennialism stems from and has a parallel in Western Dispensational premillennialism (160). In Urapmin Pentecostalism, Jesus is regarded to be a more distant figure in the trinity compared to the Holy Spirit and God (343 n. 12). Finally, there is a sense of transnational identity developed by Pentecostalism among the Urapmin in that it connects them to a worldwide community. Related to this, participation in this worldwide community means participation in white culture since the Urapmin see Christianity as a white religion (173-174). This is particularly forceful in the context of Urapmin racial identity wherein "the most fundamental fact about black and white skins is that those with black skins are overwhelmingly inferior" (2004a:171).

Holy Spirit Possession among the Urapmin

In contrast to the accounts of Pentecostalism in Jamaica and Ghana, the Urapmin had no indigenous practice of possession. During the early stages of the revival, the initial experience was usually described in the following way:

Urapmin remember feelings of enormous sadness brought on by deep conviction of sinfulness. Their bodies became extremely hot, and they cried in anguish as

they recognized the enormity of their need for correction. They furthermore found themselves immediately convinced that Jesus' return was imminent and that it would usher in the day of God's final judgment. [Robbins 2004a:131]

When possessed by the Holy Spirit, the Urapmin use the imagery of being “‘kicked’ by the Spirit” (2004a:131). As mentioned above, this experience was accompanied by gifts of the Spirit including healing, visions, dreams or glossolalia (131). For the Urapmin, Holy Spirit possession is not only a form of empowerment in conversion but also in everyday life. The Holy Spirit is considered to be the only way that one can achieve and maintain proper morality and the Urapmin believe that the Holy Spirit is continuously with them informing their thoughts and actions (231). Furthermore, in order to make one's heart an acceptable place for the Holy Spirit, the Urapmin place great importance in suppressing their own will; “the Spirit refuses to visit those who are given over to their own wills and the bad thoughts and emotions they foster” (2004a:231). Sin, according to the Urapmin, physically collects in their body until confessed and then is forcibly removed through possession by the Holy Spirit (282).

Spirit Women. This being said, Holy Spirit possession takes place in mainly two forms among the Urapmin (though they do come into contact with the Holy Spirit during healing ceremonies as well). The first is among a special category of ‘Spirit women’ and the second involves a ritual dedicated to seeking Holy Spirit possession called a ‘Spirit disko.’ Spirit women go into a trance to “work the Spirit” where they are physically moved, speak in tongues, and are shown prophetic visions. Spirit women are usually sought to identify the source of illness, which the Urapmin usually attribute to offended nature spirits or bad feelings such as anger in the community. Once the ritual is completed, a Spirit woman will explain to the community what she has seen and what the Holy Spirit has instructed them to do. Through this

special relationship with the Holy Spirit, Robbins notes that these Spirit women are conferred social and religious authority and given a space within Christianity (135-136). In pre-Christian times, men played the role of diviners, fulfilling a similar role as these Spirit women do now, with the exception of possession (341 n. 8).

Spirit Diskos. At the start of his description of Spirit diskos, Robbins notes that “Spirit possession dances (Spirit disko) are without a doubt the feature of Urapmin Christian life that is most striking to an outsider encountering it for the first time” (2004a:281). Spirit diskos are separate events from church services that take place at night for the sole purpose of confessing sins and having them removed by Holy Spirit possession. Spirit diskos begin with a brief prayer followed by circular dancing to rhythmic music sung by women. The music resembles melodies from traditional ‘drum dances’ but with Christian lyrics (283). After some time, participants may become possessed and begin to lose control over their bodies. During this time, individuals appear to have no regard for their fellow dancers and may become violent. According to Robbins, “the violence of the possessed person is understood as an effect of the Holy Spirit wrestling with the person’s sins, striving to throw them out of the body” and “a sense of violence and danger pervades the ecstasy of the rite” (2004a:284-285). Those not possessed do attempt to control the possessed from complete abandonment and causing too much harm to themselves or other dancers. An individual may be possessed for more than an hour and the entire event may last several hours, sometimes even going through the night. Not everyone needs to become possessed for the Spirit disko to be efficacious. Usually older men are the ones who do not become possessed and they sometimes question their status of being saved because of this (288). Afterwards, the Urapmin report feeling light and believe to have had all of their sin

removed during the dance (286). The Spirit disko ends with prayer, scripture reading or sometimes a sermon.

However, the Spirit disko does not always work. Confession of sins is a major part of the Spirit disko and if possession fails to occur it is often thought that someone in the community must not have confessed all their sins. Similarly, if they worry that they have committed a sin during the dance, such as getting mad at someone, they immediately confess so that the ritual can go on. Moreover, the Spirit disko is stopped if possession does not take place within a certain amount of time (282). Finally, the Spirit women are often the first to become possessed. If only they do, however, it is considered a failure, and it takes at least a couple others from the community to become possessed to make it efficacious (348 n. 11). In this way, Robbins suggests “the Spirit disko acts as a moral gauge for the Urapmin” (2004a:287). If possession fails to take place the community takes it as a sign of not being in proper relationship with God.

Robbins' Analysis

In analyzing Pentecostalism and cultural change among the Urapmin, Robbins (2004a:6-15) employs a self-described structuralist approach. Robbins is interested in “explaining cultural change in cultural terms, stressing that none of the processes by which cultural change occurs are themselves meaningless or outside of culture” (2004a:10). Accordingly, Robbins characterizes the Urapmin as residing between “two different cultural logics,” one indigenous and the other Christian (2004a:xxvi). The following is a clear summary of his analysis of the social context in his own words:

Recent studies from Africa and Native North America suggest that Pentecostalism is often appealing to people like the Urapmin who are marginal not only on a map of the world that includes the West but also locally.... These are people who...have been humiliated or otherwise diminished in traditionally meaningful

terms. It is not surprising that Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on the accessibility of the power of the Holy Spirit, proves attractive to people in this situation. By making the Spirit available to everyone, Pentecostalism radically localizes Christian authority, and because it is institutionally very decentralized, it does not cast people into peripheral roles in churches whose headquarters are elsewhere.... Finally, by virtue of its otherworldliness and millennialism, it directs attention away from the earthly landscapes in which people like the Urapmin see themselves occupying the fringes. [Robbins 2004a:33]

This analysis clearly is similar to Austin-Broos' (1997) and Meyer's (1999) in characterizing Pentecostalism as existing comfortably between two different regimes of meaning, usually in terms of tradition and modernity, enabling its adherents to negotiate their own typically uncomfortable position that results from this interaction. For Robbins, this uncomfortableness comes from the interaction of two systems with "counterposed paramount values" rather than from stress caused by "political-economic dislocations" (Robbins 2004a:314). Within this framework, Holy Spirit possession can be seen as the stage where this struggle is played out.

Robbins argues that the Urapmin are in a continuous struggle between willfulness and lawfulness within the context of the two cultural logics. In the Spirit disko, the Urapmin experience this struggle physically. Robbins interprets the violence of the dancing as willfulness and struggling with the lawfulness being imposed upon them by the Holy Spirit. In the end, lawfulness transcends the willfulness as the individual submits. Therefore, after a successful Spirit disko wherein one is possessed by the Holy Spirit they are considered to be free from sin (achieving the prescriptions placed upon them by Christianity) but are always in danger of committing sin again (by associating with tradition) whereby they must seek possession all over again.

CHAPTER 4

POSITIONING THE PRACTICE

How do we make sense of the ethnographic material presented above and begin to understand possession in the Pentecostal context? To start, it is useful to review some of the similarities and differences in Pentecostalism and Holy Spirit possession seen in the case studies above. Following this, I will add further context to the material through an examination of anthropological studies on spirit possession, emphasizing both how it contributes to understanding Holy Spirit possession as well as its limitations. Finally, I will review Emma Cohen's (2008) categories of executive possession and pathogenic possession and suggest its usefulness for understanding the diversity of Holy Spirit possession.

Organizing the Material

Importance of Context

It is worth stressing the socio-cultural context that structures Holy Spirit possession in all three case studies. All three place Pentecostalism as negotiating between seemingly opposing regimes of meaning. For Austin-Broos, it is the "politics of moral orders" in an arena of competing ideological regimes constituted by a regional hierarchy of ideological and economic power structures (1997:7). For Meyer, Pentecostalism resides between modernity and tradition and "enables people to move back and forth between" them (1999:163, 212). Robbins sees the Urapmin negotiating between "two different cultural logics" (2004a:xxvi). Related to this is the demonization of local tradition (Meyer 1999:84; Robbins 2004a:148).

Marginalization and social change seem to be recurring themes. For example, Austin-Broos characterizes the Jamaican Pentecostals as “the culture of slaves whose descendants became Pentecostals” (1997:7). Here we see economic, political and social marginalization among primarily black Jamaican lower-classes. Meyer (1999:177) notes cultural change through colonization and Christianization and a situation today where poverty is common. In the case of the Urapmin, Robbins claims that they are not so much marginalized economically or politically in their local context as they are through the changes in their traditional culture and losing their status in the Min regional system; therefore, they now see “themselves occupying the fringes” (2004a:3, 314).

Moreover, in each study we see the important influence of local and regional relationships. For example, Pentecostalism’s engagement with local religions often serves to mutually inform each other. For example, in Jamaica we saw that some Pentecostals were engaged in a conversation with other revivalist religions as well as orthodox and secular Jamaicans who marginalize them as “poor and ‘ignorant’” (Austin-Broos 1997:18). The Peki Ewe Pentecostals are similarly in a dialogue with local tradition and engaged in a tension with indigenous religions. Moreover, beyond the local and regional level, transnational processes come into play as well. This also regularly includes regional and transnational race relations.

For example, for the Urapmin:

Against a nationalism that argues that people’s most important identities are those they share with their fellow citizens, Christianity offers the Urapmin an identity that links them to a larger community that exists beyond Papua New Guinea’s borders. And against the binarism of Urapmin racial thinking, their Christianity suggests ways in which the differences between blacks and whites need not preclude either relationships between them or the possibility of black moral improvement. [Robbins 2004a:173]

Christianity is seen as a white religion, and through possession by the Holy Spirit the Urapmin gain access into this domain.

Variation in Holy Spirit Possession

It also became evident that there is a diverse range of phenomena relating to Holy Spirit possession in these accounts. For example, Holy Spirit possession occurred in the form of baptism following conversion, as a continual presence residing in the Pentecostal informing belief and behavior, and during moments of ‘full-infilling’ not necessarily associated with either. Austin-Broos (1997) notes a strong emphasis on a two-step process, with baptism in the Holy Spirit coming post-conversion, although these also may occur simultaneously. After this, the Holy Spirit is thought to remain as a form of empowerment to remain moral. Moreover, individuals may become repossessed at later times to experience a “full-infilling” (1997:143). Meyer (1999) shows that the emphasis on seeking Holy Spirit possession is for deliverance from evil spirits. Like the Jamaicans, the Peki Ewe also find empowerment and protection through Holy Spirit possession. Finally, the Urapmin find relief from sin that is accumulating physically in the body through possession during the Spirit disko (Robbins 2004a:286). For all three, this is an impermanent state that must be continually pursued through prayer, otherwise they leave themselves open to possession by unwelcome spirits. In these accounts we see Holy Spirit possession also expressed bodily in a sense of one’s body being taken over by an outside force either through bodily movement (usually conceptualized as a struggle between evil spirits and the Holy Spirit within the body), bodily constriction (following the experience), glossolalia and so on.

The Localization of Holy Spirit Possession

Moreover, Holy Spirit possession in the case studies, as has already partly been indicated, is highly localized in terms of indigenous interpretation. For example, in the Jamaican case we saw that women understand the Holy Spirit to enter through their vagina and an emphasis on the defilement that comes through sex. As Austin-Broos (1997:146) showed, this particular understanding is contingent on local and historical understandings of the woman's body and its position in society. Among the Peki Ewe, one's spirit is "an open space in the mind which can either be filled by Mawu's spirit or an evil one" (Meyer 1999:145).

Gendered Differences

Furthermore, in all three cases there were gendered differences in the experience of Holy Spirit possession. In addition to what has already been indicated in chapter three, a recurring theme was that women were more likely to experience Holy Spirit possession than were men. The reasons for this varied according to which gender was consulted. For example, in the Peki Ewe case women found this to be a source of spiritual pride whereas men thought that women were spiritually weak (Meyer 1999:185). Another interesting example comes from the Urapmin where we saw that if only the Spirit women are possessed during the Spirit diskos then the event is not considered to be efficacious and the community will continue collecting sin (Robbins 2004a:348 n. 11).

Function of Holy Spirit Possession

A final aspect that is immediately noticeable is that the individuals in the case studies view Holy Spirit possession as accomplishing something. Simple though this may be, it is clear

that this is an important aspect of the ritual. For Jamaicans, Holy Spirit possession makes them a saint and imparts health and protection. Among the Peki Ewe, individuals are delivered from the power of traditional spirits through Holy Spirit possession. It is a form of empowerment over life's concerns. For the Urapmin, the Holy Spirit enables them to be moral and informs their thoughts and actions beyond the possession experience. As an extended example, the Urapmin consider Holy Spirit possession to be the source of:

Goodness in people's hearts and actions.... The idea that people can only succeed in being ethically upright if they have the Spirit's help is a key tenet of Urapmin ethical thought, and it is explicit in their understanding of peacefulness. People often feel the Spirit is with them and has guided them to take particular actions. They say in such cases that the Spirit "speaks" to them. When they say this, they do not mean that they receive this speech aurally but that they experience the Spirit's guidance as a heart filled with clear thoughts about which they feel no "ambivalence".... In this way, the Holy Spirit is experienced as the presence of a peaceful, calm inner state. [Robbins 2004a:231]

This was a recurring feature in the other studies as well; the Holy Spirit was believed to empower the individual and enable success in all aspects of life. Moreover, Holy Spirit possession is understood to authenticate faith and to be a sign of being an authentic Christian.

The Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession

Anthropological Definitions of Possession

With the case studies presented and organized, I will now turn to the anthropological literature on spirit possession. It will be suggested that this tradition is both limited and useful in understanding possession in the Pentecostal case. It is limited in that theories of spirit possession have been primarily developed among traditional, small-scale, non-Christian spirit cults and, especially over the last several decades, in that anthropologists have favored studying possession on its own terms in local contexts. For these reasons, though these approaches are valuable, they

are nonetheless limited in an attempt to compare Pentecostal Holy Spirit possession cross-culturally. Nonetheless, the anthropological literature on spirit possession is immediately useful in drawing Holy Spirit possession into a field of related phenomena despite vast differences in social and historical contexts. Accordingly, it may be useful to consider how these two might be related in order to examine what the anthropological study of spirit possession can contribute to understanding Holy Spirit possession as well as what the study of Holy Spirit possession might contribute to the current body of knowledge about spirit possession.

The anthropological literature on spirit possession is far too expansive to review in any detail here. Rather, I will sketch a broad picture of this tradition by reviewing some classic anthropological definitions followed by a brief review of several theoretical orientations that anthropologists have employed to understand possession before extending this discussion to the Pentecostal case. To begin, in the introduction to the edited volume, *Case Studies in Spirit Possession* (Crapanzano and Garrison, eds. 1977), Vincent Crapanzano defines possession as “any altered state of consciousness indigenously interpreted in terms of the influence of an alien spirit” (1977:7). Altered states of consciousness might include:

Alterations in thinking such as disturbances in concentration, attention, memory, and judgment as well as an impairment in reality testing and a marked tendency toward archaic modes of thought, a disturbed time sense, loss of control, changes in emotional expression (ecstatic and orgiastic feelings, detachment, etc.), changes in body image, perceptual distortions, changes in meaning or significance such as an increased evaluation of subjective experiences, ideas, and perceptions, a sense of the ineffable, feelings of rejuvenation, and hypersuggestibility. [Crapanzano 1977:8]

Moreover, Crapanzano also points out that possession is most often associated with trance or dissociation in his understanding. Therefore, there is a distinction between “trance and possession trance” (1977:9). As can be seen, Crapanzano’s definition of possession, as an

attempt to capture a wide range of behavior and belief in the ethnographic literature, is quite expansive.

Another influential definition of possession comes at the start of Janice Boddy's (1994) article, "Spirit Possession Revisited", published in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Boddy is an anthropologist affiliated with the University of Toronto whose own research on spirit cults was based on the *zar* cult in a village in the Sudan (407, 416). In her review of the anthropological literature on possession, Boddy states that:

Spirit possession commonly refers to the hold exerted over a human being by external forces or entities more powerful than she. These forces may be ancestors or divinities, ghosts of foreign origin, or entities both ontologically and ethnically alien. Some societies evince multiple spirit forms. Depending on cultural and etiological context such spirits may be exorcised, or lodged in relatively permanent relationship with their host (or medium), occasionally usurping primacy of place in her body (even donning their own clothes and speaking their own languages) during bouts of possession trance. *Possession*, then, is a broad term referring to an integration of spirit and matter, force or power and corporeal reality, in a cosmos where the boundaries between an individual and her environment are acknowledged to be permeable, flexibly drawn, or at least negotiable. [Boddy 1994:407]

Notably, like Crapanzano's definition, Boddy's is rather broad in order to account for the diversity seen in the anthropological literature on spirit possession. Though wide-ranging and not culturally specific enough to be of much help here, both do serve to draw Holy Spirit possession firmly into the scope of similar ethnographic phenomena.

Theories of Spirit Possession

Anthropologists have understood possession, broadly, either in terms of explanatory (psychological, biological, medical) or interpretive models (communicating meaning, reflecting culture). As Boddy explains it, research on possession "has been characterized by a fundamental tension between reductive, naturalizing or rationalizing approaches on the one hand and

contextualizing, more phenomenological approaches on the other” (1994:410). According to Boddy, those who emphasize interpretive models in the study of possession make use of a metaphor of communication to interpret possession as “an idiom for articulating a certain range of experience” (1994:412). These approaches emphasize the notion that possession is embedded in culture, can only be understood in that context because meaning is assigned to possession by culture, and that, in the end, positivist explanations ignore local context (408, 410). Those who seek to explain spirit possession as a cross-cultural phenomenon attempt to categorize possession and find correlations, for example, between frequency of possession and type of social organization (410). Often, explanatory models explained possession in terms of medicalization, meaning that “possession signaled personal or social pathology” (Boddy 1994:410; cf. Csordas 1987). However, in Boddy’s own words, “typologies, of course, are achieved at the expense of context and inevitably reflect the interests, values, and fascinations of the analyst’s society. Though heuristic, they are often mistaken for explanation or interpretation when applied, and using them as predictors can blind researchers to the complexities of the situations they describe” (Boddy 1994:410).

The studies that Boddy suggests are corrective of these approaches “have tried to break through prior restrictions to examine possession on its own terms in the societies where it is found. These studies locate it in wider social and historical contexts, describing how it acts as a prism through which naturalized constructs (e.g. of person, gender, or body) are refracted or undone” (1994:408). Studies that Boddy offers as examples of this trend include, among others: her own work on the *zar* cult where she draws on Bourdieu (1977) to “point to a fundamental relationship between women’s embodiment of gender-appropriate dispositions...and the proclivity to become possessed” (Boddy 1994:416); Brown’s (1991) work among Vodou priests

in Haiti and New York that “convincingly portrays Vodou religion as experienced, as ‘embedded in the vicissitudes of particular lives’” (Boddy 1994:417; Brown 1991:15); Comaroff’s (1985) characterization of possession among Pentecostals in South Africa as partly a form of cultural resistance; and Csordas’ (1988, 1990, 1993) study of Catholic Charismatics and his use of phenomenological and semiotic approaches to suggest a model of embodiment. However, as Cohen has observed:

As historical and cross-cultural comparative and explanatory approaches increasingly gave way to particularistic interpretive accounts in anthropology, the relevance of a generalizable definition of...possession declined.... However, insofar as these anthropological studies of particular cases of particular people in particular places and contexts continue to endeavour to speak to one another, even at a basic descriptive level, the thorny issues of definition necessarily remain uncomfortably salient. [Cohen 2008:102]

This trend of moving away from comparative approaches proved to be unhelpful for examining Holy Spirit possession cross-culturally.

Also, anthropologists have explained spirit possession variously in terms of hegemony or resistance. According to Barbara Placido (2001), they have either viewed those who experience possession as being distressed and losing agency or as an explicit form of cultural resistance thereby achieving agency; “spirit cults have thus slowly shifted from being considered weapons of the weak, responses to disempowerment caused by political, economic, ethnic, and gender factors, to being seen as historically sensitive modes of cultural resistance” (2001:208). However, as Placido argues, structure alone does not determine or explain possession in different cultural contexts in regards to whether it is a form of hegemony or counter-hegemony. Rather, it is what people do with possession that defines what it is.

Taken together, approaches to spirit possession in the literature have either been based on biological or cultural explanations and have either emphasized the conditioning aspects of social-

economic-political-etc. structure or agency and empowerment. For this paper, I wanted to move beyond these polarizing ends of explanation and explication, universalizing and particularizing, agency and structure, hegemony and counter-hegemony. In my view, anthropology does not have to focus on one of these to the exclusion of the other, and both are necessary for a truly holistic view of what it means to be human. These dualisms in fact parallel larger trends in the discipline and, as George Stocking observes, “their relationship may also be seen as one of enduring epistemological tension, both within a single individual, or more generally, within the anthropological tradition itself” (1992b:279).

Bringing in Holy Spirit Possession

The broad sketches offered above point to the fact that anthropological studies of spirit possession tend to be polarizing to some degree with many recent studies generally emphasizing individual agency, empowerment, embodiment, cultural critique and cultural resistance (Boddy 1994:414). Another aspect of anthropological studies of possession is that they generally come from traditional, small-scale, non-Christian spirit cults. As Placido notes, “the literature on spirit possession has tended to ignore studies in...more institutionalized settings” and “the literature on...Pentecostal and Christian Churches has not generally focused on spirit possession *per se*” (2001:208-209). Despite this, a brief look at Boddy’s (1994) summary of anthropological findings concerning possession in a wide ethnographic sense illustrates well how this tradition illuminates Holy Spirit possession in the Pentecostal case as well as how a study of Holy Spirit possession might contribute insights of its own. I will focus on her discussion concerning gender and interpersonal relations.

To begin, Boddy argues that women's increased involvement in possession should not necessarily be seen as resulting from women's subordinated role in society (which is hinged on ethnocentric definitions of what constitutes subordination), but as a result of what women actually do in a particular society. For Boddy, spirit possession can be understood as "gendered moral activity in specific locales" (1994:418). As pointed out above, Holy Spirit possession in the case studies presented did show gendered differences. Boddy argues that "if we focus on what women do, rather than what they cannot, we find them working in the spiritual realm on behalf of themselves, their families, households, or communities, channeling spirits' assistance or heading off their wrath, protecting future generations, even protesting injustice" (1994:416). Here, the emphasis on individual agency is obvious; we see women acting for their own ends in their cultural milieu. Moreover, Boddy views women's involvement in possession as resistance to domination. Meyer's (1999) study in particular, however, shows that although women do seek empowerment over their social situation through Holy Spirit possession, they are also embedded in a particular context that constrains their behavior and the decisions they are able to make. As we saw, through Holy Spirit possession, women may be delivered of the family *trǎ*, thereby asserting their independence and individuality, yet at that same time they are affirming the patriarchal moral order of both tradition and Christianity. It is neither open resistance nor passive submission.

Another feature of spirit possession that could be commented on is Boddy's observation that "several authors remark on how possession thickens interpersonal ties," that "many spirits have coherent public identities and, as social actors, mediate among kin," and that "whether possession clarifies, modulates, or obfuscates kin ties, it invariably denaturalizes them, and undermines their givenness" (1994:423). Strikingly in the Pentecostal case, especially in cultures

that were traditionally communally oriented, several authors have noted that while Pentecostalism deemphasizes traditional notions of kinship ties, it has the powerful capacity of generating a sense of transnational identity and a community of believers to which one belongs (see e.g., Brison 2007; Meyer 1998, 1999; Robbins 2004a). Holy Spirit possession seems to be key to this process. In many cases, the distress, sin, or demonic possession from which Pentecostals seek the cleansing power of Holy Spirit possession, is associated with traditional culture or traditional kin ties. Possession by the Holy Spirit, which is understood to be supra-local and transcendent, absolves the Pentecostal of kinship ties while at the same time integrates them into an imagined global community (cf. Anderson 1983). Locally, possession by the Holy Spirit reinforces community ties among fellow Pentecostals. Moreover, the Holy Spirit could be seen as a public actor mediating among Christians. In all three of the case studies presented above, the Holy Spirit acted as a mediator of social relations in the communities by informing belief and behavior towards others. From a social scientific point of view, even if we do not take seriously the fact that the Holy Spirit is really real, we must take seriously that the Holy Spirit is really real to those who seek an experience with this member of the Trinity. The issue then becomes how we can explain this claim in social scientific terms rather than religious terms.

Cohen's Pathogenic and Executive Possession

As mentioned above, by the middle of the 1990s anthropologists had largely moved away from explanatory models and cross-cultural definitions of possession (Boddy 1994). However, a recent attempt by Emma Cohen (2008) to categorize types of possession may be useful in making sense of Holy Spirit possession. Cohen is an anthropologist whose own fieldwork experience includes eighteen months studying an Afro-Brazilian spirit cult in Brazil drawing on

theories from the cognitive science of religion (Cohen and Barrett 2008:248; see also, Cohen 2007). Drawing on this experience as well as other ethnographic material from the literature on spirit possession, the sum of Cohen's (2008:103) argument is that there are cross-culturally recurring features of spirit possession that can be divided into two broad forms based on panhuman cognitive processes which act to constrain and order the recurring features. Cohen's typology is not definitive, and one must avoid covering local variations, but it is heuristic. In order to suggest the usefulness of Cohen's categories, I will need to review her argument in some detail.

Cohen (2008) reviews previous explanatory models, identifying a critical distinction that these models were based on, and discusses why they have been subsequently criticized. Cohen starts with Erika Bourguignon's (who attempted a cross-cultural categorization of possession) distinction between possession trance and possession, both of which involve that a "person is changed in some way through the presence in him or on him of a spirit entity or power, other than his own personality, soul, self or the like" (1976:8). The main distinction that Bourguignon made between the two is that 'possession trance' is marked by an altered state of consciousness while 'possession' is not. As mentioned above in the brief discussion concerning the study of possession by anthropologists, Cohen notes that the attempts by Bourguignon and others to explain and categorize possession cross-culturally have been widely criticized "for their failure to capture the complexity, variability, and polysemy that characterize actual representations of possession on the ground" (2008:102). One major point of contention regarding the distinction between possession trance and possession is that it relied too much on a distinction between behavior and belief and was therefore arbitrarily drawn. Essentially, in comparing various possession phenomena in diverse contexts, Bourguignon (1976) divided the phenomena based on

whether it affected behavior or belief although alternative divisions could have been easily drawn if based on different criteria. Based on this distinction, some scholars mistakenly reduced cross-cultural instances of possession trance to biological explanations (Cohen 2008:105).

With these shortcomings, along with a turn to interpretive and contextualized accounts of spirit possession, anthropologists argued that possession trance must be understood in cultural terms. Cohen offers Lambek's (1989) critique as an example, stating that his "key suggestion was that not only is possession a whole social complex, but trance also (generally considered as a psychobiological capacity) is cultural" (2008:105). Though not disputing the validity of these criticisms and agreeing that a distinction based on trance is misguided, Cohen suggests that in turning exclusively to interpretive approaches anthropologists might have thrown the baby out with the bath water. For Cohen, there is room, and in fact a need, for both "descriptive and interpretive approaches" and to "consider both the ethnographic and scientific data" (2008:106). Cohen argues that if we are to compare or theorize about possession related phenomena cross-culturally there must be a "well-circumscribed description of what phenomena may be usefully and legitimately compared, and of what the theory applies to (and what it does not)" (2008:103). Drawing from recent research in the fields of cognitive science and evolutionary anthropology, Cohen attempts to build a framework that could facilitate analytic precision in the comparison of spirit possession cross-culturally.

In short, Cohen argues that "notions of what constitutes possession and the paths by which possession concepts and practices are transmitted, even across vastly different cultural environments and historical periods, are informed and constrained by recurrent features of evolved human cognition that guide perception, representation, thought and action" (2008:103). Based on this argument, Cohen makes the distinction between two broad forms of spirit

possession: pathogenic possession and executive possession. Beginning with pathogenic possession, Cohen outlines the following conditions that are its minimal conditions:

(a) the presence of an agent in or on a person, that (b) either causes no (perceived) effects (e.g. the spirit is ‘dormant’) or causes physical effects, such as disease or illness, or psychological effects, such as depression or hallucinations, or existential effects more broadly defined, such as financial misfortune, and that (c) may persist indefinitely or until a diagnosis is made and the agent is dispossessed of the host’s body. [Cohen 2008:109]

These being the minimal sets of conditions, the following are recurring (though not necessarily universal) characteristics of pathogenic possession according to Cohen: pathogenic possession does not involve the “displacement of a person’s identity” (2008:109); the identity of the possessing spirit is often not made evident or identified by name until dealt with in some form; the possessing spirit might gain access because of a weakened spiritual or physical state; the remedy for pathogenic possession resembles the process of cleaning physical contamination; this type of spirit possession usually involves “the incorporation of spirit-as-essence, not spirit-as-person, into the body” (2008:114); and finally, “the spirit is primarily and most basically represented as a contaminating substance or essence (material or immaterial)” (2008:114). Importantly, Cohen also claims that pathogenic possession may also involve spirits or essences that “are perceived to cause desirable effects” and therefore ill effects are not a necessary condition (2008:119).

According to Cohen, there are panhuman cognitive processes that might partially explain the recurring features of pathogenic possession. Cohen argues that this form of possession is based on cognitive processes that work in the representation of “contamination and illness” (2008:114). Cohen draws on research that suggests that belief in contamination is universal even through the forms and cultural ascriptions of value vary widely. This, then, is a notion of “possession-as-contamination” (2008:116). Supporting this claim is the observation that the

basic structure of pathogenic possession resembles “concepts of disease and illness the world over, in that it involves a causal structure that links cause (immediate and secondary), symptoms, prevention (e.g. by means of avoidance) and cure (e.g. by means of expulsion and/or cleansing)” (2008:115). In order to illustrate this resemblance, Cohen points out that a recurring feature of pathogenic possession is that the possessing spirit may have gained access to the possessed because of “weak spiritual or physical defences” which subsequently need to be reinforced (2008:116).

Cohen’s (2008) pathogenic possession clarifies some of the phenomena that were reported in the case studies above, particular among the Peki Ewe in Meyer’s (1999) account. As we saw, Peki Ewe Pentecostals may be possessed by evil spirits without any form of identity displacement or even necessarily knowledge of the possession. Once it becomes evident to them that misfortune is being caused by spirit possession they seek deliverance through Holy Spirit possession and it is only here that the evil spirit is identified and named. Furthermore, unless they continually seek protection through prayer and empowerment through Holy Spirit possession they leave themselves open to further affliction by evil spirits. In the Urapmin case (Robbins 2004a), it is ‘sin’ that physically accumulates in the body that needs to be expelled, but the process and function is strikingly similar.

The second broad form of spirit possession Cohen identifies as executive possession, with the following as minimal conditions:

- (a) the presence of an incorporeal intentional agent in or on a person’s body, that
- (b) temporarily affects the ousting, eclipsing or mediation of the person’s agency and control over behaviour, such that (c) the host’s actions are partly or wholly attributable to the intentions, beliefs, desires and dispositions of the possessing agent for the duration of the episode. [Cohen 2008:109]

These being the minimal set of conditions, the following may be characteristics of possession as executive possession in comparison to pathogenic possession according to Cohen: executive possession usually involves displacement of the individual's identity (the possessed's identity is replaced by the "person-identity" of the spirit, 2008:113); as an alternative to displacement, a 'fusion' model (discussed below) may better describe possession phenomena in some cases; the individual may be treated by others as if they were the spirit including being called by the spirit's name; moreover, "alterations of voice and vocabulary, special abilities to heal and counsel, and apparently miraculous feats are now explainable against this background of information about the person-identity of the possessing agent" (2008:113). Of special consideration is that this type of possession does not necessarily have to involve trance or an altered state of consciousness; for example, "trance-free divine inspiration, brought about by the incorporation of God into one's body, may be cognitively represented in much the same way as executive possession involving dissociated states" and "the host could be partially or fully conscious of the situation but unable to exert any executive control over his or her behaviour" (2008:119). Finally, Cohen suggests that an individual may be both pathogenically and executively possessed by the same spirit at different times.

Similarly to pathogenic possession, Cohen attempts to correlate executive possession with panhuman cognitive processes. For executive possession, Cohen suggests that it is partially explained by cognitive processes that have to do with our development and understanding of a "world of intentional agents" (2008:103). Cohen argues that research "support[s] the conjecture that the cognitive capacity to grasp and employ concepts that represent the autonomy of person-identity and body is widespread, if not universal, and emerges early in childhood" (2008:113), with exceptions (see e.g., 112). Therefore, "the cognitive mechanisms that underpin the

panhuman capacities to represent persons as having an identity...and that guide our intuitions about the relations between person and body also appear to be mobilized by executive possession concepts” (2008:113). In other words, Cohen suggests that there is a human tendency to privilege a view that one’s identity remains separate from one’s body. Even though a person’s body may age we tend to maintain that their identity remains the same (112). In the case of executive possession, this might explain beliefs that maintain that one’s identity can be displaced by another agent (spirit), whose identity would remain the same even if occupying a different person’s body (113).

Cohen’s discussion of two types of spirit possession appears to be useful in making sense of the phenomena of Holy Spirit possession that was presented in the case studies above, particularly her observation that a single spirit may be expressed as both pathogenic and executive. First, in the case studies above, Pentecostals report having an experience of being possessed (baptized, filled, etc.) by the Holy Spirit, usually following conversion, followed by later episodes of re-possession not related to the initial baptism in the Holy Spirit: such as the occasions of ‘full-infilling’ as the Jamaicans report it, or in deliverance ceremonies as the Peki Ewe report it, or for divination (Spirit women) or during Spirit diskos as the Urapmin report it. All of this is best understood as executive possession in Cohen’s terms. These experiences are usually thought to be an instance where: the Holy Spirit is perceived to be in or on their body (Cohen’s minimal condition for executive possession (a)); which mediates their agency and controls behavior usually represented by glossolalia (or other gifts of the Spirit) and bodily movements (dancing, falling to the ground, etc.) (Cohen’s minimal condition for executive possession (b)); and what takes place during this episode is attributed to the Holy Spirit being in or on their bodies (Cohen’s minimal condition for executive possession (c)). Finally, Cohen also

suggests that an individual who is possessed in the sense of pathogenic possession (such as in the Peki Ewe example that I offered above following the review of pathogenic possession) may seek executive possession in order to “identify the demands of the possessing agent” and eliminate it (2008:110). This can be seen clearly among the Peki Ewe who seek Holy Spirit possession in order to identify and to cleanse themselves of the source of pathogenic possession (Meyer 1999:158).

Moreover, Cohen distinguishes between differing models of executive possession. These variations include the displacement model, which she considers to be the most widespread, and others that are more “rare” such as the fusion model and the oscillation model (Cohen 2008:117; Cohen and Barrett 2008). The displacement model “entails the complete displacement of the host’s agency by that of the spirit” (Cohen 2008:117). Cohen and Barrett (2008) describe the fusion model as Cohen observed in an Afro-Brazilian cult in the Amazon. In this model, when an individual is possessed, “one new entity with a unique blend of attributes is created and this entity is what animates and controls the host’s body in possession” (2008:249). As they report in this case, “fusion of host and spirit during possession explains why different mediums possessed with the “same” spirit entity exhibit very different manifestations” (2008:250). Finally, the oscillation model describes instances of executive possession where the person being possessed and the spirit doing the possessing struggle for control over agency (250). Although it would require more research across Pentecostal cases of executive Holy Spirit possession, one could make the argument that all three of these models would need to be employed to account for the variation seen in Pentecostalism. And although Cohen calls fusion and oscillation models more rare, it would appear that they could be extended to the Pentecostals under consideration here.

Finally, there is the sense of Holy Spirit possession where, following initial baptism, the Holy Spirit is thought to reside in the individual as a form of empowerment and protection against further pathogenic possession, yet the individual maintains agency and there is no displacement of their own identity. As a form of empowerment, the Holy Spirit may be a source for the gifts of the Spirit that may be exercised apart from the agency of the Holy Spirit. In this form, possession by the Holy Spirit is best understood as pathogenic possession in Cohen's terms, especially if taking into consideration her observation that pathogenic possession does not necessarily mean the presence of distress and negative contamination. In other words, the contamination in this case takes the form of positive contamination (2008:103). In this form of Holy Spirit possession, we see that: the Holy Spirit is believed to reside in or on the individual (Cohen's minimal condition for pathogenic possession (a)); this presence can either cause physical (e.g., speaking in tongues under one's own agency), psychological (e.g., the presence of the Holy Spirit was repeatedly reported to result in peace), existential (e.g., the presence of the Holy Spirit within the individual is believed to be the source of good fortune and the ability to be moral), or no perceived effects (Cohen's minimal condition for pathogenic possession (b)); and the Holy Spirit is believed to reside in the individual for an indefinite amount of time (Cohen's minimal condition for pathogenic possession (c)). In this case, the behavior is attributed to the individual (in contrast with executive possession) and the individual is not addressed as if they were the person-identity of the possessing spirit.

Although Cohen's categories are helpful in articulating the different forms of Holy Spirit possession, it does not explain what it accomplishes in its particular context. It is a main claim of this thesis that Holy Spirit possession needs to be studied beyond the boundaries of isolated rituals, beyond simply being interpreted as moments of catharsis or reflections of intentional

resistance, to an exploration of what this might mean for the Pentecostal life. With these broad sketches in place, I would like to now turn to what I understand to be the substance of Holy Spirit possession in these communities, and arguably for a broader range of Christians who practice the presence of God through the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRACTICE OF PRESENCE

In this final chapter, it is my intent to begin to draw together some of the various threads from the above discussions and to incorporate theoretical perspectives from what has been referred to as a focus on skilled learning in religious practice (Luhrmann, et al. 2010) as well as Bell's (1992) notion of ritualization and the ritualized social body. Both perspectives, I believe, contribute to an understanding of what takes place beyond the sphere of Pentecostal ritual that was put in motion therein. This section will focus on the role of Holy Spirit possession in the Pentecostal life, or its practical efficacy, trying to understand the claim that Pentecostals make that possession by the Holy Spirit is transformative.

Skilled Learning

To begin, there are several anthropologists that have recently begun to focus on the learning process in religious experience that is practically effective in molding belief and behavior in faith and in life more broadly (cf. Luhrmann, et al. 2010:67). One of these anthropologists, Saba Mahmood (2001; see also, 2005), who conducted two years of ethnographic fieldwork on the women's mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt, is interested in the relationship between ritual behavior, that is generally considered to be formal and rule-governed, and everyday behavior, that is considered to be pragmatic, informal and spontaneous. As Mahmood (2001:827) reviews, the standard line among anthropologists is that ritual activity is set apart in some way that distinguishes it from everyday activity (ritual behavior is 'conventional' while everyday behavior is 'spontaneous' and 'intentional'). Accordingly, this has usually meant that ritual "is understood to be a space where individual psychic drives are

either channeled into conventional patterns of expression or temporarily suspended so that a conventional social script may be enacted” (2001:828). She does not deny the usefulness of these ‘conceptual pairs,’ but mainly wants to contribute to our understanding of how these two spheres are related. In Mahmood’s study, this relationship is explored through the Egyptian women’s performance of the *Ṣ alāt*, Islamic ritual prayer. As Mahmood argues:

For the women I worked with, the ritual act of Muslim prayer (*Ṣ alāt*) did not require the suspension of spontaneous emotion and individual intention, neither was it a space for a cathartic release of unsocialized or inassimilable elements of the psyche. Rather...mosque participants identified the act of prayer as a key site for purposefully molding their intentions, emotions, and desires in accord with orthodox standards of Islamic piety...in the entirety of one’s life, and was not a space conceptually detached from the daily tasks of routine living.... The conscious process by which the mosque participants induced sentiments and desires in themselves, in accordance with a moral-ethical program, simultaneously problematizes the “naturalness” of emotions as well as the “conventionality” of ritual action, calling into question any a priori distinction between formal (conventional) behavior and spontaneous (intentional) conduct. [Mahmood 2001:828]

Here we see that these women understood prayer as inseparable for normal activities and the cultivation of Islamic piety. What took place in the ritual of prayer was practically efficacious in other aspects of their life, central to conditioning and becoming the individuals that they longed to be. For the Pentecostal case, Mahmood’s study may give us a way to view how the practice of Holy Spirit possession might mold belief and behavior in order to realize an idealized life—as a form of empowerment for change.

Of course, the interest in the relationship between ritual and non-ritual activity is not new in the anthropology of religion. For example, one of Victor Turner’s most influential contributions to the study of ritual was his appropriation and elaboration of Arnold van Gennep’s (1960) concept of rituals as rites of passage with a processual structure—separation, liminality and incorporation—that moves an individual from one status to another. During this process, the

individual undergoes separation from the community and is removed from their normal position in the social structure, progresses through an ambiguous state of liminality, and is finally incorporated back into the social structure with a new status (Turner 1967:94). During the liminal phase, individuals are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, and ceremonial” (Turner 1969:95). Moreover, this ritual process is capable of creating a sense of ‘communitas’ for those who go through the liminal stage together. Turner developed an understanding liminality and communitas as anti-structure: “I have used the term ‘anti-structure’...to describe both liminality and what I have called ‘communitas.’ I meant by it not a structural reversal...but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social structures” (1982:44). Therefore, ritual is seen as a space that is capable of moving an individual from one status to another while creating a sense of social cohesiveness.

To discuss another example, this one from the contemporary evangelical movement in the United States, Tanya Luhmann (2004; see also, Luhmann, et al. 2010) analyzes the processes by which the ‘divine’ becomes ‘real.’ It has a practical effect on the individual, forcefully reorganizing and legitimizing their world. Luhmann’s primary research orientation has been in psychological anthropology and she is known outside the discipline of anthropology for conducting anthropological fieldwork among psychiatric residents and their teachers (e.g., Luhmann 2000). What is useful in Luhmann’s (2004) study of evangelical Christians is a practical examination of what ritual activity means in a broader sphere. As Luhmann argues, the evangelical Christians that she studied “learn to have out-of-the-ordinary experiences and to use them to develop a remarkably intimate, personal God” (2004:518). The ethnographic

material that her study is based on comes from a large southern California church called Horizon, that Luhrmann simply describes as evangelical, which has about five thousand members at its main church and twenty-five thousand at its various associated churches. It seems that it could be usefully categorized as part of the third-wave of charismatic Christianity, or neocharismatic, that was introduced in the first chapter, and this specific church does not place much importance on the gifts of the Spirit such as glossolalia. Nonetheless, the experience of trance that Luhrmann argues generates the realistic relationship with God is not a difference in kind from the experience of God through Holy Spirit possession in the case studies above, but is, I would suggest, a difference in degree.

Contrary to recent anthropological work on evangelical Christianity that privileges religious language over ritual in making the divine appear to become real to people, such as Harding's (2000) that Luhrmann claims makes the case "that in evangelical Christianity, what makes God come alive to people is the mastery of His word," Luhrmann argues that "the patterns of new U.S. religious practice suggest that ritual practices and psychological techniques are not ancillary but central to contemporary spirituality. At least, congregants seem to want to experience the Gospel in intensely bodily ways that seem to make the message of the Gospel come alive for them in a way it has not previously" (2004:518). For Luhrmann, what characterizes these movements above all is this focus on the experience of the divine which is learned through a process she calls metakinesis. Simply put, metakinesis is the way that an individual learns to recognize psychological, bodily, and social phenomena as indicators, learned socially, of God's presence in their lives. The following summarizes her use of this term:

I use the term *metakinesis* to refer to mind-body states that are both identified within the group as the way of recognizing God's personal presence in your life and are subjectively and idiosyncratically experienced. These states, or phenomena, are lexically identified and indeed the process of learning to have

these experiences cannot be neatly disentangled from the process of learning the words to describe them.... In identifying metakinetic states, congregants identify—and, thus, psychologically organize—bodily phenomena that seem new and distinctive to them, which they come to interpret in ways that are congruent with the group’s understanding as evidence of God’s real reality in their lives. They seem to be engaging a variety of bodily processes that are integrated in new ways and synthesized into a new understanding of their bodies and the world. Some of these processes could be called “dissociative,” in which attentional focus is narrowed and manipulated to produce noticeable shifts in conscious awareness, so that individuals feel that they are floating or not in control of their bodies. Others involve sensory hallucinations, in which people see or hear things that observers do not. There are specific and dramatic mood elevations, in which individuals are self-consciously and noticeably happier for extended periods of time. *As a result of these phenomena, congregants literally perceive the world differently and they attribute that difference to the presence of God.* [Luhmann 2004:522, emphasis added]

Here we see that the indicators (whether psychological, embodied, social, or existential) that people attribute to being evidence of God’s presence begin by being socially learned. That is, their social milieu teaches them how to experience God. Moreover, once interpreted as divine presence, it becomes a powerful means of organizing ones perceived reality, effective in guiding belief and behavior.

In another place, Luhmann, with Nusbaum (a psychologist) and Thisted (a statistician) (2010), argues that this process relies on three criteria: interpretation, practice, and proclivity. In this case, the authors’ study is based on qualitative and quantitative data gathered at a Vineyard Christian Fellowship church in the Chicago area. This, too, is a third-wave neocharismatic church that shares a strong emphasis on the experience of the deity realized through prayer (including the sometimes private exercise of the gifts of the Spirit). The authors are seeking to contribute to an understanding of how religious experience is learned, in this case, learning the presence of God. Therefore, they suggest that learning to experience God involves “*interpretation* (the socially taught and culturally variable cognitive categories that identify the presence of God), *practice* (the subjective and psychological consequences of the specific

training specified by the religion: e.g., prayer), and *proclivity* (a talent for and willingness to respond to practice)” (2010:67). In short, learning to experience God involves a thinking subject, who society inscribes with the necessary knowledge, and an acting subject, who practices the knowledge through ritual. Added to this, proclivity means that some are more cognitively inclined (the authors propose a theory of ‘absorption’ that may explain this inclination) to rich religious experience than are others. What is important here for my overall argument is that Holy Spirit possession involves the conditioning and limiting features of external structures (how experience is ordered by socio-cultural environment as well cognitive processes) and the reorganizing properties of intentional agency. Both aspects, structuring and structured, take place during the practice of Holy Spirit possession, with implications for the formation of identity and for the reworking of one’s world.

Ritualization

Through Catherine Bell’s (1992) notion of ritualization, I will suggest that Holy Spirit possession has practical effects not limited to the experience itself. Whereas Luhmann (2004) argues that it is through psychological and cognitive processes that one’s relationship with the divine becomes real, Bell applies a theory of practice to the study of ritual with an emphasis on the body and power. What is useful about this approach is that it forcefully integrates ritual activity into the sphere of social activity and it explains in part ritual activity’s efficacy in life ‘outside’ the ritual. Moreover, Bell’s work shows that in ritual (for my purposes possession), the individual is neither a passive recipient of the social order nor has full agency in resisting that order. I will begin by reviewing Bell’s notion of ritualization before attempting to show its

usefulness in the case of Holy Spirit possession while before incorporating insights from the ideas above concerning skilled learning.

Bell begins her review of ritual theory, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, by discussing how theories of ritual have at their core an assumption concerning the “opposition of thought and action” (1992:6). It should be clarified that Bell’s work is addressed to the interdisciplinary field of ritual studies rather than the anthropological study of ritual though she does address much of this literature and at times the discipline itself (3). As Bell claims, there appears to be two recurring ‘structural’ patterns in the theorizing of rituals: “ritual is first differentiated as a discrete object of analysis by means of various dichotomies that are loosely analogous to thought and action; then ritual is subsequently elaborated as the very means by which these dichotomous categories, neither of which could exist without the other, are integrated” (1992:21). As one example she uses to show how ritual is theoretically constructed in this way, Bell analyzes Clifford Geertz’s (1973) theoretical writings about ritual. As Bell argues:

At times Geertz explicitly correlates religious ritual with ethos and religious belief with worldview, thus invoking the first structural pattern in which ritual activity is taken for activity in contrast to belief as thought. At other times he presents ethos and worldview as synthesized, fused, or stored in symbols that are arranged in various systems, patterns, or control mechanisms such as ritual, art, religion, language, and myth. However, these systems do not only store a synthesis of ethos and worldview; they are also seen to effect it. Geertz argues with regard to ritual that “any religious ritual no matter how apparently automatic or conventional...involves this symbolic fusion of ethos and world view.” Here the second structural pattern appears in which ritual involves the integration of thought and action categories. [Bell 1992:26]

According to Bell, such approaches are problematic because they wrongly separate ritual activity from social activity. By contrast, Bell “proposes that so-called ritual activities be removed from their isolated position as special paradigmatic acts and restored to the context of social activity in general” (1992:7). Therefore, Bell suggests an approach that views ritual acts as ritualization,

which she describes as a strategic way of acting that sets it apart, according to cultural prescriptions, from other forms of acting, yet still remains in the overall realm of social activity. Therefore, ritualization is defined by Bell as “a strategic way of acting...which emerges as a particular cultural strategy of differentiation linked to particular social effects and rooted in a distinctive interplay of a socialized body and the environment it structures” (1992:7-8). Here is another way she defines this term: “I will use the term ‘ritualization’ to draw attention to the way in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions” and, “in a very preliminary sense, ritualization is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities” (1992:74). To make sense of these statements I will need to discuss Bell’s use of practice theory (most simply, those theories that attempt to integrate both actor and structure in social analysis) in the study of ritual as well as what she means by ‘a socialized body.’

Practice Theory

Sherry Ortner (1984) traces the beginnings of practice theory in anthropology to the 1970s, with it gaining a much broader appeal by the 1980s after the English translation of French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1978) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* was published. Though a highly diversified approach, practice theory can be defined broadly as an attempt to take into account both the actor and structure (symbolic and social) without privileging one or the other, examining how they articulate together, and how they mutually inform each other’s trajectory (Droogers 1998:27). Various scholars working with the term practice, and the related terms of “praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, [and] performance,” attempt “to explain the

relationship(s) that obtain between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we may call 'the system,' on the other hand" (Ortner 1984:144, 148). The variation comes in with how 'the system' and 'human action' are conceptualized. As Ortner reviews, the system has been characterized mainly in French structuralist views of a system or in American notions of culture, though both share in viewing the system as a whole that organizes human experience through "institutional, symbolic, and material forms" (1984:148). And, human action is understood to be "anything people do" (1984:149), as Ortner bluntly states it, with variation in the who (most work has considered the individual actor more so than communal action), when (the unit of time that informs action, whether short-term decisions or decisions made according to longer frameworks), and kind (what kind of action, falling somewhere between seeing behavior as simply rule-governed or with unlimited freedom) (149-150). Ortner also discusses how practice theorists view the interaction of the structure and actor. Noting that there has been a long tradition of anthropological interest in how culture (the system) influences or shapes behavior and belief as well as how culture is transmitted and changed from one generation to the next, Ortner more or less states that practice theory attempts to integrate both of these interests. With the conditioning aspect of culture, practice theorists emphasize hegemony and dominance and the restrictive qualities of how culture limits the possible range of individual belief and behavior. With cultural transmission and change, practice theorists emphasize how the individual actor simultaneously reproduces and changes culture through practice (152-157).

Additionally, a look at Bell's (1992) own review of practice theory will help to clarify her particular approach. In the Marxist sense, "practice was a methodological focus through which to solve...the relationship between consciousness and reality, subject and object, idealism and materialism" (1992:75). In response to polarizing theories based on materialism or idealism,

theorists who have appropriated the term have used it “to denote” and “transcend” the “dialectic of the material and the symbolic” (1992:76). Moreover, anthropologists use practice to describe a relationship of individuals to culture wherein “the social world is both structured and structuring, that is, both shaped by practice and shaping of practice in return” (1992:76). Bell’s primary criticism of practice theory is that it still tends to, similar to her criticism of ritual theory in general, privilege a dualism of thought and action. Nonetheless, the main aspect of practice theory upon which Bell builds her notion of ritualization is the interaction between how culture is structured by practice while also structuring of practice, or said another way, how practice is structured by culture while also structuring of culture.

Social Body

Also central to Bell’s (1992) notion of ritualization is the concept of a social body. Bell contextualizes a focus on the social body in several disciplines as being influenced by three broad sources (94). The first source is research within the anthropological tradition that has emphasized how the body is not excluded from the process of socialization. According to Bell, this tradition has shown “how social categories shape the decoration, perceptions, and dispositions of the body” leading to an understanding of “the body as a social construction in the image of society and a microcosm of the universe” (1992:95). Here, Bell offers works by Douglas (1973) and Turner (1967) as examples: “Douglas explored the social body as ‘a highly restricted medium of expression’ and a key to the relationship of self, society, and cosmos” and “Turner pushed the primacy of the body further by arguing that it is the human organism itself, and not society, that is the *fons et origo* of all classification” (Bell 1992:94). The second source stems from the critical examination of the mind-body dichotomy in several disciplines. This has

lead to research that seeks to understand how the mind and the body are fundamentally related and mutually inform each other. As an example, Bell (95-96) cites research by linguist George Lakoff (1987) that shows that although classification systems are culturally constructed they are also constrained by panhuman cognitive processes. The third source of increased focus on the social body comes from feminist studies that have shown gendered differences in experience. The end result has been an increased focus on the body as a social body; “it appears we are now reappropriating the image of the body: no longer the mere physical instrument of the mind, it now denotes a more complex and irreducible phenomenon, namely, the social person” (Bell 1992:96). Moreover, the social body offers a valuable way to understand aspects of ritual. In regards to ritualized acts within ritual space, Bell claims that “a focus on the acts themselves illuminates a critical circularity to the body’s interaction with the environment: generating it, it is molded by it in turn” (1992:99). The example that Bell uses to illustrate this, from Rappaport (1979), is particularly helpful in understanding the thrust of the claim here:

Rappaport makes a similar point in describing how the act of kneeling does not so much communicate a message about subordination as it generates a body identified with subordination. In other words, the molding of the body within a highly structured environment does not simply express inner states. Rather, it primarily acts to restructure bodies in the very doing of the acts themselves. Hence, required kneeling does not merely communicate subordination to the kneeler. For all intents and purposes, kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself. [Bell 1992:99-100]

With this, Bell also points out that an individual may be resistant to subordination while even in the midst of it (100). This speaks to aspects of legitimacy and power, resistance and inscription that can take place during ritual.

To summarize, for Bell (1992), ritual action *is* social action in that ritual is defined as such by the social effect it produces in its particular context. Ritual can be thought of as one of the places in life where one embodies, in a give and take, the norms and values of one’s culture

and is empowered to act more successfully socially. Here is another way that Bell makes a similar claim, which also draws ritualization back into the discussion: ritualization as a way of acting plays a part “in the production of a ritualized social body, a body with the ability to deploy in the wider social context the schemes internalized in the ritualized environment” (1992:107). Moreover, in this process of ritualization the body is the locus for negotiation, resistance, acceptance, manipulation, reformation, etc., of the structure that was internalized. Therefore, there is a process of structured and structuring. What is structured and structuring through ritualization, according to Bell (1992:170, 191; see also, 204), are primarily the relationships of power and ideology in particular settings.

Ritualization, Experience, Transformation and Holy Spirit Possession

This understanding of ritual as a space wherein people are constituted while also engaged in the act of constituting is, I believe, a useful way to understand some of the dynamics of Pentecostal ritual. In my view, anthropologists must acknowledge the role of the experience of the Holy Spirit in both organizing and reworking the Pentecostal experience. As was suggested in the reviews offered at the start of this paper, anthropologists have not developed much research on Pentecostal ritual and what the experience of the Holy Spirit means for the Pentecostal from a social scientific perspective. In order to move us in that direction, I will make some observations drawing on what was presented above in the review of Pentecostalism, the three case studies, and the theoretical orientations provided by Mahmood, Luhrmann and Bell. Though I will address a few issues, my main point is that Holy Spirit possession, rather than only moments of cathartic release or symbolic representations of social distress, is a means of powerfully restructuring and legitimizing Pentecostal belief and behavior.

One insight that can be drawn from Bell's (1992) work is how ideology is negotiated during ritual. Though Bell's discussion concerns the role of religious ideology in ritual, I think it can be extended to other forms of ideology as well. According to Bell, "rituals [do] not necessarily cultivate or inculcate shared beliefs for the sake of solidarity and social control" (1992:187). In other words, rituals are not necessarily only a place of "social conditioning" but also "complicity, struggle, negotiation": "any ideology is always in dialogue with, and thus shaped and constrained by, the voices it is suppressing, manipulating, echoing" (1992:187, 191). In this way, "subcultures...are forms of resistance" (1992:187, 191).

As was evident in the material presented above, one recurring feature of Pentecostalism is that it seems to be compatible with those who are somehow marginalized by their particular society, whether socially, economically, etc. In my view, part of the draw of Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit, is how it enables Pentecostals to resist dominant ideologies and somehow address this marginalization. This was seen in the Jamaican case in regards to racial and social marginalization. As Austin-Brooks observed, Jamaican Pentecostals are marginalized by society as "poor and 'ignorant'" (1997:18). Moreover, due to a particular history of slavery and racial hierarchies, most Jamaicans are racially marginalized as well. These dominant ideologies are dramatically resisted through Holy Spirit possession. Through the legitimizing force of possession by the Holy Spirit, the Jamaican Pentecostal transcends the racial hierarchy of the region and is incorporated into a worldwide community of saints, even if not fully realized in everyday life. In a similar way, Holy Spirit possession gives Urapmin Pentecostals access to a larger community that transcends the racial and national ideologies in Papua New Guinea. I am emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in this process,

rather than Pentecostalism itself, because it seems that the dramatic experience of Holy Spirit possession is what legitimizes the restructuring of the Pentecostal worldview.

A similar example could be offered from Fiji. According to Karen Brison, one aspect of Pentecostalism's success in the region (the church that her study is based on has fifty thousand members in Fiji and nearby islands) lies in how it gives Fijians the sense of a more equal participation on the global level because of the "imagined world community" that they are now a part of, which is understood to be decentralized and egalitarian (2007:23). Church rhetoric places Fiji now among the civilized nations of the world. Even more, they believe themselves to be in a superior position in that they now have the duty of bringing the gospel back to a world that has abandoned it. The power of the Holy Spirit is key to this interpretation. In a sermon that the head pastor of the church delivered to the congregation concerning Fiji's role in carrying the gospel to the rest of the world, he mentions a passage from Acts 1:8 where Holy Spirit possession empowers the transmission of the gospel. According to the pastor, the activity of the Holy Spirit in Fiji is evidence that "Fiji has a very special place in the heart of God regarding the fulfillment of the Great Commission" (2007:32-33). Again, I suggest that central to this reordering of the Fijian worldview is the legitimizing and empowering experience of Holy Spirit possession.

What is forceful about Holy Spirit possession is that it is an embodied experience of the negotiation, resistance, acceptance, etc., in the struggle over control, identity and ideology. In all three of the extended case studies presented above, during a ritual of Holy Spirit executive possession intended to rid the body of a pathogenic possession, the loss of bodily control is understood by the Pentecostals as being caused by the struggle between the Holy Spirit and the source of pathogenic possession (either sin or an evil spirit, typically a demonized traditional

nature or ancestral spirit) (see e.g., Austin-Broos 1997:205; Meyer 1999:158; Robbins 2004a:284). In each of the cases, the source of the pathogenic possession is generally understood as coming from a source they are trying to leave behind. In the Jamaican case, the source of sin and sickness comes from transgressing a moral code that is in opposition to the one they held as slaves. In the Peki Ewe case, the sources of disease and misfortune were the spirits of their indigenous tradition and religion. In the Urapmin case, the source of sin was failing to live up to the ethical code of Christianity and submitting to their indigenous system. In each case, the struggle of becoming what they desire to be is played out in the body, making their struggle remarkably tangible. In this way, Holy Spirit possession is a tangible source of empowerment and control over one's circumstances. Recalling again Austin-Broos' observation: "although Jamaican Pentecostals must strive through daily practice to be holy, it is magical possession by the Holy Ghost that actually makes a believer a saint, one who can aspire to a sinless life" (1997:34). However, Austin-Broos also notes that becoming a Saint does not take place in a single moment, but there is a real sense of a process of achieving that state through practice and continually seeking the possession of the Holy Spirit (cf. Austin-Broos 1997:143; Meyer 1999:145; Robbins 2004a:281-282). It is through this process of experiencing the Holy Spirit that Pentecostals are able to reorder their life-worlds, to conform their thoughts and desires to an idealized life. It is striking that the Pentecostal representation of Holy Spirit possession is usually spoken of in terms of power and transformation.

Given this sense of continued practice, it is useful to take into consideration what Holy Spirit possession—in both the executive and pathogenic sense that was suggested above—might mean for Pentecostal identity and personhood. In a very real sense, Holy Spirit possession contributes to an altogether new identity for the Pentecostal, an identity that is forcefully

legitimized and made real through the experience of possession. This new identity is fundamentally based on a privileged relationship to the Holy Spirit that now informs belief and behavior. It would be foolish to claim that this conceptualization of personhood motivates all belief and behavior or that it does so for all Pentecostals to the same degree. It seems that, for some, this may play a rather minor role in everyday life while others might make, for example, most decisions based on the understanding that the Holy Spirit lives in their body (cf. Bielo 2007 for a discussion of the potential implications of ‘born-again personhood’).

A passage from one of the case studies discussed above illustrates the need to focus on this relationship. The following is a personal narrative of a Jamaican woman recounting when she received the baptism in the Holy Spirit some time after her initial conversion:

I heard myself speaking in tongues, glorifying God. You know, something was evident, marked. I got up off my knees, you know, after the Holy Spirit has sort of subsided, and I couldn't get up because I was weak. I felt that all strength had gone from my body, but I felt a love that I didn't feel before, something big and swelling and bubbling, and I feel that I could just love everybody around.... Then I didn't feel like I was me. I felt like I was all, like I was not here. Something had happened, I was “walking on air,” as it were. I had to tell myself, “What has happened? What has happened?” I felt different, I was no longer the woman who had been saved from July, baptized from July. I felt different, and that went on for the whole week, you know. The presence of the Lord was so near that whenever I took up a book to read, a Bible, or a hymn book to sing, you know, the presence of the Lord would just fill the room, and I would feel the Spirit in my body, some great power just taking over.... It has been like that through the years, you know. God has been near. He has been here. It's not just, you know, something imaginary. He's close, and he's real, and he's dwelling in me. Whatever it is, whatever you need, whatever you desire, you can talk it over with him. [Austin-Broos 1997:137-138]

In this narrative we can see clearly how Holy Spirit possession is understood to result in a change of identity for this woman and this new identity now informs broader aspects of her life. Recalling Luhrmann's (2004) study, bodily phenomena in this case came to be identified and interpreted as evidence of the reality of God's presence and participation in her life.

Accordingly, her belief and behavior came to be informed by this perceived reality. It is this transformative practice of Holy Spirit possession that appears to be critical to understanding what Pentecostals have to say about radical change.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to contribute to broadening our understanding of a feature of Pentecostalism that has been noticeably absent in the anthropological literature—the study of Pentecostal ritual, and in this case, the various rituals surrounding Holy Spirit possession (cf. Robbins 2004b:126). In order to do so, Pentecostal Holy Spirit possession was approached through the context of several frames: the anthropology of Christianity and the anthropological study of Pentecostalism; three case studies—from Jamaica, Ghana and Papua New Guinea—of Holy Spirit possession in local contexts; and Bell’s (1992) concept of ritualization and the anthropological study of possession and skill learning in religious experience.

Throughout this thesis it was argued that the traditional anthropological study of spirit possession does illuminate certain cross-cultural aspects of Holy Spirit possession but is also limited in that theories of spirit possession have been primarily developed among traditional, small-scale, non-Christian spirit cults (cf. Placido 2001:208-209) and, especially over the last several decades, in that anthropologists have favored studying possession on its own terms in local contexts (cf. Cohen 2008:102). Secondly, it was suggested that Cohen’s (2008) typology of executive and pathogenic possession is heuristic for organizing and comparing the diversity of Holy Spirit possession presented in the case studies. Thirdly, building on practice theory, Bell’s (1992) notion of ritualization contributes to an understanding of Holy Spirit possession as social activity and is useful for exploring how the practice both constitutes and reworks the Pentecostal’s world. Moreover, taking seriously the claim that possession by the Holy Spirit is transformative, the notion of a ritualized social body as well as recent work in the anthropology of religion that focuses on the practice and process of learning in religious experience suggests

that we may think of Holy Spirit possession as practicing a new identity that informs Pentecostal belief and behavior (cf. Mahmood 2001; Luhrmann 2004; Luhrmann, et al. 2010). Finally, it was suggested that in order to understand Pentecostalism and Pentecostals, anthropologists must take this experience seriously, not only in specific instances of possession, but also in how it is a major organizational feature in terms of social relationships and conceptions of personhood and worldview that ultimately inform belief and behavior in more broadly defined ways.

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