Pentecostals and Politics
Redefining Big Man Rule in Africa[1]

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Charismatic Pentecostalism has been described as the most powerful social movement to affect Africa over the last generation.[2] Over 100 million Africans now identify as Pentecostals, which is coloring the way people worship, seek places in society, and endeavor to overcome poverty across much of the continent.[3] The political impact of the movement, however, is the subject of much debate. One perspective suggests that Pentecostalism is reshaping African political culture by virtue of its gospel message. A second line of reasoning suggests that Pentecostalism provides a means for understanding and addressing the occult influences on African power and politics. Still others argue that Pentecostalism stands as a counterweight to the dysfunction of African politics, or as a fulfillment of Weberian political economies.

What is the relationship between Pentecostalism and politics in contemporary Africa? How might our theoretical descriptions account for both the good of the movement and the ill, which range from an expansion of social outreach on one hand to corrupt leaders and ambiguous claims to power on the other? In this chapter, I present an answer to those questions rooted in the longstanding African institution of "big man rule." In short, charismatic Pentecostalism offers an alternative channel through which African big men can enter into patron-client relationships with their followers. The result is a rearranging of informal networks and a shift in the characteristics of political big men, yet the movement's political impact can nevertheless be understood as a continuation of traditional modes of African political choice.

Charismatic Pentecostalism, alternatively referred to as born-again, new or neo-Pentecostalism, is characterized by a focus on prophesy and the Holy Spirit, experiential worship (such as speaking in tongues), and material wellbeing.

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[1] This chapter is a partial reprint of McCauley 2013.

[2] Gifford (2004) calls new Pentecostalism the most significant ideological reformation on the continent.

[3] For data on the movement's expansion across Africa, see The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Overview: Pentecostalism in Africa," http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Overview-Pentecostalism-in-Africa.aspx.

Its spread began in the late 1970s, as a new generation of churches and leaders distinguished themselves from the classic, mission-based Pentecostal churches. A puzzle for social scientists interested in the movement's expansion in Africa is that, in its origins, charismatic Pentecostalism represented an apolitical turn toward the individual's spiritual and material needs; politics, most of the early charismatics suggested, was a "dirty business" of corrupt exchange and insincere dialogue (see Ojo 2006). Yet, the movement's expansion has been so overwhelming that a political role, in one form or another, has become unavoidable in many African countries, particularly the Anglophone ones. Thus, how does a movement initially wary of the political process assume a political position commensurate with its newfound and important social influence? Does Pentecostalism generate advantages in the formal politics of elections and parties? Does it provide a platform for understanding contestation and conflict? Or does it influence the informal institutions that feature prominently in the politics of the region? Viewing charismatic Pentecostalism as a new form of political big man rule provides a common answer to these distinct areas of political involvement.

Scholars have already applied the big man label as a description of leadership in the charismatic Pentecostal movement. Paul Gifford, for example, notes a shift away from popular participation and toward a model of "unchallengeable big men" (Gifford 2004:188). David Maxwell (1998) applies the concept of the big man to the leadership structure of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) revivalist movement. Ruth Marshall (2009:105–107) describes the new forms of prestige that have made leaders of the born-again Pentecostal churches in Nigeria analogous to political big men, and Ogbu Kalu (2008) writes of the "big man of the big God." While the term resonates with observers of superstar pastors, megachurches, and excessively rich Pentecostal benefactors, largely missing from the discussion has been a careful analysis of the political implications.

The chapter begins with a review of scholarly perspectives on Pentecostalism in Africa, and then of the notion of big man rule as it applies to the political distribution of resources and loyalty. Focusing on the role of informal institutions and the importance of ethnic ties in patron-client relations, I characterize the region's politics as deeply reliant on reciprocal relations between big men patrons and their loyal followers. I then explore the contemporary breakdown in the traditional system that has created space for the charismatic Pentecostal movement to emerge, for some, as an alternative to kinship ties. I argue that the financial crisis of the late 1970s sparked a change in social values and an opportunity for new norms to develop. Furthermore, an expanding government administration has undercut the strength of customary norms,

but the state has remained weak in its ability to address social welfare needs. Finally, the increasing urbanization of African states pulls individuals away from their traditional support networks. The outcome is an upsurge in the need for new networks of support, and in the space for revivalist religious movements to fill that void and gain popular salience. Next, I consider the features of charismatic Pentecostalism that make this particular movement an appealing contemporary alternative for both patrons and clients, with respect not only to their customary kinship ties but also to traditional, mainline churches. Finally, I consider the impact of Pentecostal big man rule on the three dimensions of African politics noted above: formal electoral politics, contestation and conflict, and the informal institutions central to African political exchange.

The approach I take in this chapter is admittedly a more instrumentalist one than most accounts of the new and powerful Pentecostal movement in the region: I give greater attention to the social benefits of leadership and belonging in charismatic Pentecostal churches, and less attention to the spiritual dimension of charismatic worship. Yet, the social equilibrium that I present between Pentecostal leaders and their followers turns critically on congregants' embrace of the authority of their big man pastor as close to God-like. Similarly, the existence of a Pentecostal form of big man rule depends on leaders who embrace their special callings to bring the Holy Spirit to worshippers. From that foundation of spiritual commitment, a patron-client form of exchange can develop in mutually beneficial fashion. Thus, the social benefits of big man rule need not be viewed as the purpose behind charismatic Pentecostal worship. Rather, this chapter intends to highlight the sociopolitical outcomes that emerge when Pentecostals and their leaders engage in their particular form of Holy Spirit worship.

The argument is based on evidence collected during two-years of field research, conducted primarily in Ghana but also Nigeria. Data for the project include interviews with over 40 Pentecostal leaders and 500 congregants of various denominations, as well as ongoing observation in a number of charismatic Pentecostal congregations. While the data that informed the project are drawn from a limited geographic area, the argument is intended to apply broadly to the movement that affects much of sub-Saharan Africa.

Perspectives on Pentecostalism in Africa

The rapid expansion and the complexity of charismatic Pentecostalism in Africa has inspired a number of interpretations, each of which adds to our

collective understanding of the movement's social and political impact. From a theological perspective, Yong describes African Pentecostalism's encounter with the political realm as a reshaping of African political culture through the gospel message (see Yong 2010). Understanding Jesus as a sanctifier, healer, and coming king, as Yong suggests Pentecostals do, inspires a desire for social outreach and a broader engagement in political affairs, in order to reflect biblical teachings. That perspective offers one account for the shift toward political engagement, and it explains some of the positive, pro-social contributions of the movement.

Other scholars, conversely, recognize the strong ties between new Pentecostalism and the challenges posed by a globalizing, capitalist world. Given the anxiety that arises as political economic structures change, as well as the appeal of material gain with little effort, the practice of charismatic Pentecostalism can be viewed as an extension of occult practices. On one hand, participants rely on prophesy and magic to attain material ends; on the other, they condemn the explicit use of witchcraft and morally ambiguous means of reaching those ends (see, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Lindhardt thus describes charismatic Pentecostal churches as providing a means for navigating the mystic, occult forces in African society, and for putting the occult economy into an acceptable, contemporary format (Lindhardt 2009). This approach offers an account of the perhaps darker side of charismatic Pentecostalism, insofar as occult practices are often more private and thus free from broader scrutiny. Emphasis on the occult can also give rise to "false prophets" who might exploit participants for personal enrichment.

A third perspective suggests that the dysfunction of African politics created pressure for a new sociopolitical approach, to which revivalist religious movements like charismatic Pentecostalism are particularly well suited. In the post-Independence period, corruption, mismanagement, and general political failure came to define much of African politics. In that context, charismatic Pentecostalism offered a plausible social alternative, prioritizing a rupture from the past and the centrality of new miracles as counter forces against the demonic.[4] In viewing the movement as a response to political failure, we gain insights into the explicit political impact of charismatic Pentecostalism—in terms of, for example, a rejection of corruption, the fragility of democratic support, and the role of inter-group conflicts. What this perspective often sets aside are the informal patterns of political exchange that have long persisted in African politics and that will continue to play a central role so long as formal political institutions remain weak.

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4   For an excellent summary of this view, see Marshall (2009).

Finally, some suggest a Weberian, Protestant work ethic as the explanation for charismatic Pentecostalism's success in Africa. Meagher, for example, sees conversion to new Pentecostal churches as an embrace of education, skills, legitimate access to resources and opportunities, and modern means of social advancement (Meagher 2009). This view offers sociological grounds for the pro-social outcomes associated with the new Pentecostal movement, though it has less to contribute to debates over the morally ambiguous elements of the movement and its leaders.

Viewing charismatic Pentecostalism as a new form of big man rule in Africa builds on these literatures while preserving the traditional preeminence of patron-client exchange in African politics. Rather than explaining one type of impact (such as pro-social community outreach) or another (such as the reliance on occult forces and self-aggrandizing prophets), the argument for Pentecostal big man rule highlights the shared incentives of elites and masses that generate both positive and negative sociopolitical outcomes. In a shared embrace of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal leaders and their followers neverthe-less operate in an informal institutional setting where critical needs must be met. This argument explains how charismatic worship can create, as a by-product, a new outlet for addressing those needs.

Traditional Big Man Rule in Africa

Big man rule conventionally describes the relationships between patron and client in a patrimonial system, with an emphasis on the personal—sometimes almost mystical—power of the patron and the distance between leader and subject. Notorious leaders like Mobutu Sese Seko, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and Daniel arap Moi are frequently cited as examples in the African context, but the concept of the big man applies equally well to contemporary leaders and to local chiefs or powerful figures who operate below the national level.[5] The essence of the patron-client relationship is that patrons provide material resources, services, and opportunities—to which they as big men have access but others do not—to their followers in exchange for loyal support and alle-giance (Hyden 2006). That relationship ensures that clients have their welfare needs met directly, and that big men enjoy the authority and legitimacy neces-sary to maintain power.

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5 For example, David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi (2012) characterize the current
   Rwandan regime as a patrimonial, big man state.

Patronage exchanges constitute a centerpiece of contemporary scholarship on African politics. Some scholars suggest a link to pre-colonial norms that encouraged elites with uncertain time horizons to capitalize on their positions of influence.[6] Others highlight the importance of exogenously imposed colonial borders, that, when coupled with extractive institutions, resulted in states not representative of nations but rather of diverse and oftentimes competing sub-national units. The solution was a kind of "nationalist bargain," whereby new leaders made great promises of support and welfare to their constituents, in exchange for loyalty to the state—personified by the leader himself.[7] Still others emphasize the role of clients who learned to view the state as a vessel for resources and opportunities to which they as citizens were directly entitled, in "prebendal" fashion (Ekeh 1975, Joseph 1987). Common to explanations of the ongoing relevance of patronage in Africa is a weak post-colonial state unable to fulfill the social welfare needs of its citizens through formal channels.

Several features of big man rule are worth noting. First, the relationship assumes repeated interactions between patron and client, thus mitigating the odds of shirking and helping to establish trust between parties in the exchange.[8] Second, the personal nature of the exchange is viewed as a better guarantee for both parties; patrons would otherwise face greater susceptibility to overthrow or loss of power, and clients would have no clear channel to the provision of resources that they desire. Third, competition in systems driven by big man rule tends to occur horizontally, between rival elites, rather than between classes; the more powerful a group's big man, in fact, the better off that group is perceived to be. Fourth, rather than distributing resources only to a tight-knit unit or a minimum winning coalition, big men seek to enlarge their networks of support in order to build the popular legitimacy that perpetuates informal power. Most importantly, patron-client relationships between a big man and his followers in Africa typically rest on kinship and ethnic ties (Hyden 2006, Lemarchand 1972). In the context of weak states and a heavy reliance on social norms and informal institutions, one's lineage is viewed as the key

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6   On the "ordinariness" of elite patrons dating to pre-colonial times, see Bayart (1993). Bruce J. Berman (1998) describes a system of elite patronage that existed prior to colonialism and then generated alliances between traditional and colonial leaders.

7   Pierre Englebert (2000) describes the exogenous imposition of political borders. See Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001) for an explanation of extractive colonial institutions. On the post-colonial formation of personal rulers, see Jackson and Rosberg (1982).

8   Gilsenan (1977) describes these features succinctly. See also Daloz (2003).

heuristic cue in deciphering trustworthiness: to betray an allegiance along ethnic or kinship lines would evoke the sanctioning power of the local community, and that implicit threat constrains both patrons and clients in their pursuit of authority and welfare, respectively. Furthermore, insofar as the social norms governing the acquisition of both authority and welfare frequently demand respect for deceased ancestors, it behooves both patrons and clients to engage in reciprocal relations with counterparts of the same ancestral lines, however broadly defined (see Dowden 2009:318).

Finally, for the African big man, patronage resources typically come from the state: ministers and delegates in education provide schools, those in infrastructure provide roads, local traditional leaders appeal to well-placed co-ethnics in government to provide jobs, and fungible resources travel through informal ethnic channels from the government to citizens and local groups with social welfare needs.[9] This means that aspiring patrons must permeate the structures of the government, either by way of official capacity or through illicit networks, to then channel resources to their (ethnic) support bases (Alence 2004). As I note below, reciprocal, patron-client relationships in the new Pentecostal movement are quite similar in their construct, but an important distinction exists in terms of the provenance of resources that patrons marshal and distribute in exchange for loyalty.

Big man rule has generated both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the informal system of patronage has allowed diverse populations to coexist within broader national boundaries, since each group can exchange with its own patron (see Lemarchand 1972). Furthermore, the system creates a form of informal social insurance, acting as a bulwark against threats of insecurity or severe lack of basic welfare needs. Big man rule also mitigates class consciousness; ethnic groups are instead prone to celebrate inequalities with their big man as an indication of his potential to provide resources. For this reason, ostentatious presentations of wealth are frequently a norm among big men, and fanciful titles (i.e. President for Life or King at the national level, and Chief, Alhaji, or Chairman in other contexts) are embraced by both parties in the patron-client exchange (Daloz 2003). On the other hand, because patron-client relations entail a direct exchange outside the formal channels of authority, the risk is high for corrupt use of resources as well as personal enrichment. Each of these consequences has analogies in the charismatic Pentecostal context, suggesting an informal political role for the movement.

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9   For a description of patrimonial draws on state resources, see Daloz (2003).

The Emergence of a New Form of Big Man Rule

Big man rule has persisted as a key informal institution in Africa since at least independence, but indications of change are emerging. Whereas some scholars note an increasing respect for the rule of law and for formal institutions that undermine the personal whims of political leaders (Posner and Young 2007, see also Lindberg 2007), this section explores four recent trends that create space for an evolution toward an alternative big man structure, rooted not in kinship ties but in the new Pentecostal movement.

First, informal institutions and social norms are subject to change when severe conditions lead to altered social values (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Social norms can be broadly defined as the unwritten rules that regulate social behaviour by prescribing or discouraging various interpersonal actions.[10] They emerge typically through learned behaviours in particular contexts, through traditional or religious storytelling and texts, and through the example of elders and leaders, thus generating variation across states and societies: respect for authority, for example, differs in Ghana and in Zimbabwe;[11] corrupt exchange is viewed differently in Botswana and in Somalia;[12] and matrilineality commonly defines ethnic membership among the Yao but not the Tumbuka in Malawi (Mtika and Doctor 2002). Importantly, although social norms tend to be fairly resilient to change, powerful events—such as protracted government failure or standstills, severe economic downturns, natural disasters and the responses to those disasters, and conflict—can generate reflection and a re-prioritization of values, typically favouring new religious movements.[13]

As Ruth Marshall (2009) notes, the West African economic crisis of the late 1970s had exactly this kind of effect. In Ghana, for example, average income tumbled by 1980 to twenty percent below its 1950 level.[14] The economic recovery programme (ERP) of the early 1980s corrected macroeconomic imbalances, but the short-term consequences for individuals included declining returns on

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10   This paragraph relies heavily on Helmke and Levitsky (2004) and Hechter and (2001). These works are recommended for an in-depth understanding of informal institutions and social norms.

11   According to evidence from the Afrobarometer public opinion surveys, Round 4, Question 16. See <http://www.afrobarometer.org/survey-and-methods/questionairres> Accessed 21 June, 2012.

12   See *Global Post*, "Africa news: Botswana is the least corrupt African country," 1 December, 2011.

13   Helmke and Levitsky (2004) explain the capacity of norms to change; on the tendency to turn toward religion, see Ellis and ter Haar (1998).

14   See Alpine and Pickett (1993) for a description of the economic crisis in Ghana.

agricultural investment, higher prices for imported goods, and a reduction in civil service employment opportunities. These shocks to livelihood, coupled with disgust over rampant corruption, contributed to a reevaluation of values and a religious awakening (Ellis and ter Haar 1998, Gifford 1994, Meagher 2009). Some of the new religious energy focused on holiness teaching, but many new Pentecostals began to prioritize harmonious living as a response to crisis (Marshall 2009). In this manner, new values and a new form of Christian worship emerged, which drew on its transnational ties to American evangelism but which ultimately expressed an independent African desire for wellbeing and security (Kalu 2008).

Second, customary norms of exchange face contemporary challenges from expanding state institutions. Principal among them is the evolution of land tenure policies. Traditionally viewed as the purview of local chiefs and land priests, land has constituted a critical resource in patron-client exchanges (Bates 1983). More recently, however, land control has become the subject of highly visible chieftaincy-state collaborations and formalization (Boone 2007, Jackson 2007, Cotula 2007). In the Ashanti region of Ghana, land tenure decisions that were once the jurisdiction of the Asantehene, or Ruler of the Ashanti people, now go through a process of bureaucratic formalization (Ubink 2008). Ato Onoma notes, furthermore, that states exhibit increasing interest in controlling land tenure where lands provide direct economic value (Onoma 2009). State regulations are also beginning to trump customary norms governing family and health matters, such as divorce, marriage, and circumcision (Toungara 1994). The consequence is an undermining of the practical role that ethnic ties have served. Finally, party platforms are increasingly meaningful in African elections, particularly in Ghana (Whitfield 2009), suggesting an attenuation of the need for patrons and clients to rely strictly on ethnic channels in the context of political choice. As a result, though far from inconsequential, ethnic-based patronage may not complete the needs of many potential clients and may not provide access to sufficient resources for potential patrons.

Third, even as customary, ethnic-based norms have come under challenge from expanding state institutions, the state in Africa remains relatively weak with respect to its capacity to provide for the welfare needs of citizens. Aid dependence continues: even as one of Africa's most stable and economically successful states, Ghana's ratio of aid to gross national income surpassed 10 percent—the standard measure for aid dependence—during the 2000s. Other African states maintain even higher ratios.[15] Over 40 percent of Ghanaian

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15   Data in this paragraph draws on the World Development Indicators, "Data: Indicators," (World Bank, 2012).

residents lack access to electricity, and nearly one-fifth of children under five-years-old is malnourished. More generally, scholars note that structural challenges and international incentives undermine state capacity and leave citizens reliant on alternative means to meet basic needs, which can in turn undercut economic growth and prolong the negative consequences of weakness (Englebert 2009. Herbst 2000). The inability of the state to meet the everyday needs of citizens suggests that, even as ethnic channels of patronage and support are challenged, the state itself is unable to adequately fill the void.

Fourth, increasing urbanization in African states has a direct effect on traditional big man rule. Presently, over a third of Africans are residents of urban areas, up from approximately 16 percent in 1960 (see Kessides 2005). That trend is expected to continue, putting urbanization rates on pace to double between 2000 and 2030, driven primarily by growth in medium sized cities and towns. To again cite the example of Ghana, urban residents recently surpassed fifty percent of the population, at an annual rate of change of 3.4 percent.[16] By 2025, both Lagos and Kinshasa will surpass 15 million inhabitants. The consequence of urbanization in Africa is that individuals are increasingly divorced from the informal networks of the village setting: while younger generations are drawn to urban areas for education and employment opportunities, they confront the fact that relatives are not available to care for their children, and that acquaintances have no social sanctioning power to act as guarantors for loans and reciprocal exchanges. Potential clients thus find themselves in cities with fewer opportunities to express loyalty to an ethnic patron, and potential kinship-based patrons see their pool of local co-ethnics diluted by the pull of urban areas. Notwithstanding the circular and seasonal migration between rural and urban areas that is still a common feature of African states (Kessides 2005), urbanization undermines the traditional conception of big man rule and creates both the opportunity and the need for an alternative.

Data from the survey interviews I conducted in Ghana are consistent with this argument: whereas 37 percent of respondents from surrounding rural villages reported having appealed to a traditional (ethnic) leader for help in the past year, among urban residents of Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, only 6 percent stated doing so. This drop-off helps to explain the emergence of an alternative form of big man rule within charismatic Pentecostalism, not only as a label for superstar pastors, but as a mechanism for resource and loyalty distribution that accompanies powerful beliefs in the miracles of the Holy Spirit. This pattern of exchange mirrors—and perhaps now replaces for some Africans—the longstanding kinship-based network.

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16   CIA World Factbook, "Africa: Ghana" (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012).

The trends of state expansion into traditional roles, persistent state weakness in social service provision, and urbanization are widespread in Africa, though sub-national variation suggests the need for some qualification. For example, African states typically do best in providing social services to urban residents who pose the greatest threat to power (Bates 1981). Yet, because mobile residents divorced from their natal village networks are also the least likely of urban residents to organize collectively, urbanites who are not part of ethnic strongholds represent prototypical members of new informal exchange networks.

The first trend described above—shifting moral landscapes as a result of crises and shocks—depends to some degree on the (mis)fortune of states and on structural factors that govern those norms. Recent turmoil in Mali, for example, may well alter social values but is unlikely to foster much Pentecostal renewal among a population that is over 90 percent Muslim. The steep decline of the Zimbabwean economy over the past decade, conversely, represents a plausible source of religious awakening and an opportunity for an alternative form of big man rule linked to the charismatic Pentecostal movement to emerge there.[17]

Charismatic Pentecostalism as the Alternative

Having provided a causal explanation for the emergence of a new form of big man rule, this section explores the analogy between Pentecostal patron-client relations and the traditional ethnic-based patronage networks that have long underpinned political distribution in Africa.

First, if the charismatic Pentecostal movement is to be viewed as an alternative form of big man rule, who exactly are the patrons, and who are the clients? Pastors are the most obvious patrons; all congregants and potential congregants constitute their clients, and even small-time preachers can function as big men. The tendency in descriptions of new Pentecostalism, in fact, is to distinguish units not by denomination or theological interpretation, but instead by the individual pastor or Pentecostal leader himself: Mensa Otabil, Nicholas Duncan-Williams, and Dag Heward-Mills are exemplars in Ghana; W.F. Kumuyi, David Oyedepo, and Enoch Adeboye draw excessive attention in Nigeria; Ezekiel Guti and George Chikowa represent the movement in Zimbabwe; and Mosa Sono and Kenneth Meshoe are associated with the

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17   Marshall notes, for example, that revivalist forms of Islam are more likely to emerge in response to crisis in Muslim-dominated areas, but that new Pentecostalism spreads where Christianity has foundations (Marshall 2009:219).

revival in South Africa.[18] In addition, wealthy benefactors within the church can fulfill the role of big man, their clients being the poorer congregants of the church. Just as, in the traditional setting, chiefs as well as influential community members can gain access to resources and provide patronage, so too in the new Pentecostal movement can influential congregants engage in reciprocal relations that perpetuate the institution. In gender terms, the new Pentecostal movement is similarly male dominated—keeping the otherwise outdated, gender-specific notion of big man in vogue—but, just as female chiefs govern in some traditional systems, opportunities can emerge for female patrons within the Christian revivalist movement, especially in providing access to spiritual powers to the female contingent of congregants (Soothill 2007).

It has been important to the development of a new form of patronage exchange that the charismatic Pentecostal movement encourages members to break completely with their pasts (Jones 2011, Kalu 2008, Marshall 1991, Meyer 1998). According to Kate Meagher's description of born-again Pentecostals among the Igbo in Nigeria,

> adherents were forbidden to participate in their hometown association, which is viewed as a cultural obligation among the Igbo. The objective was to disassociate themselves from 'sinners' who engaged in drinking and idol worship associated with hometown socializing and ceremonial practices…They also cut themselves off from the fallback of communal assistance.
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> MEAGHER 2009:416

Congregants are thus encouraged to view past relationships as sin and to build new networks with fellow Pentecostal congregants, regardless of ethnic background. In fact, inter-ethnic relationships and marriage are encouraged (Marshall 1991). The nuclear family is also given precedence over the extended family of kin in the new Pentecostal movement, further isolating members from their kinship-based exchange networks. In cutting themselves off from the past and engaging fully in the prayer and worship of the Holy Spirit, clients face an inevitable need for new reciprocal relationships and new systems of support. The church can then fulfill that role, as wealthier members are encouraged to offer employment to fellow congregants, prayer groups double as financial advisors and childcare services, and congregants perform regular house visits to fellow members in need.

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18   On Ghana, see Gifford (2004), on Nigeria, see Marshall (2009), on Zimbabwe, see Maxwell (1998) and on South Africa, see Anderson (2005).

In light of the role that urbanization has played in undermining traditional systems of big man rule, it is of little surprise that the charismatic Pentecostal movement is described primarily as an urban-rooted phenomenon: new urban dwellers, divorced from their lineage-based support networks, require new big men from whom they can secure necessities, support, and protection and to whom they can assign their allegiance.[19] That role is neatly fulfilled by the Pentecostal pastor or wealthy congregant. By way of example, the ZAOGA organization in Zimbabwe, typical of many Pentecostal organizations, attracts largely a white collar membership and then extends its base to the urban poor and to peasants in nearby towns, thus rounding out the patronage network (Maxwell 1998). Student involvement is also a centerpiece of the new Pentecostal movement: many churches began as student meeting groups, expanding to classrooms and building space before establishing the church itself. Harvest Chapel International in Kumasi, Ghana offers a telling example, having begun as a social, prayer-based refuge for ethnically mixed Christian students away from home.[20] In rural settings, the persistence of ethnicity as a heuristic cue mitigates the need for new networks of support, but the opportunity to alter patronage attachments nevertheless increases as new Pentecostal churches expand beyond towns and cities.

Internal competition among Pentecostal big men also replicates the horizontal competition evident in the conventional patronage context: patrons seek the biggest following possible to meet their clients' desire for a leader with external renown, leading to jockeying amongst Pentecostal pastors that mirrors the efforts of competing ethnic-based big men. As a result of internal competition, Pentecostal leaders face challenges from splinter churches and from emerging revivalists (Kalu 2008:5). Kumasi's Harvest Chapel International, for instance, has split multiple times as new church leaders with somewhat distinct visions establish followings.[21] Absent a movement-wide hierarchy and often with little apprenticeship expected of pastors (see Meyer 1998), aspiring preachers of this sort can compete for the loyalty and allegiance of clients even as the vertical distance within Pentecostal churches remains significant. Similar to conventional big man rule, however, when the reign of a Pentecostal big man ends, the foundation of direct exchange between patron and client

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19   On the genesis and perceptions of urban Pentecostalism, see Jones (2005), Kalu (2008:101).

20   Interview, Rev. Roland Owusu-Ansah, Associate Pastor, Harvest Chapel International, Kumasi, 8 April 2011.

21   Interview, Rev. Roland Owusu-Ansah.

dissolves, contributing to the phenomenon of "church hopping" within a context of otherwise committed patron-client relationships.[22]

Perhaps most critically, the charismatic Pentecostal movement offers a payoff structure to patrons and clients perfectly suited to a post-crisis environment. In the context of conventional, ethnic-based big man rule, clients are paid in material resources, provided by the patron and drawn from the state. Patrons are rewarded, in exchange, with loyalty and allegiance that enables them to maintain authority. In the big man rule of charismatic Pentecostalism, however, payments may be immaterial or supernatural in nature (Marshall 2009:105). Members are blessed in their giving, such that the acts of tithing or giving openly and spontaneously can be interpreted as a reward in itself. Thus, an equilibrium emerges: patrons—pastors in particular—draw resources from the community itself, from wealthy congregants, and from external Pentecostal ties. In addition, they hold the resource of miracles and of a union between the present and the Holy Spirit. All of these resources can be marshaled and distributed in exchange for loyalty. For their part, wealthy benefactors in charismatic Pentecostal congregations give more than they receive materially; they are repaid, however, not only in terms of loyalty from below but in the faith of miracles from above. Finally, poorer congregants complete the patronage network by giving what they can in material terms, by demonstrating loyalty to their Pentecostal patron, and by receiving informal welfare benefits, and the hope of miracles, in return.

This payoff structure of Pentecostal patronage has fueled the expansion of church-based social services as charismatic Pentecostal churches in Africa mature. New Pentecostal churches are establishing educational programmes for young members that match the widely recognized activities of mainline Christian denominations, for example (see Ojo 2005). In South Africa, Malawi, Uganda, and elsewhere, charismatic Pentecostals engage in outreach for victims of AIDS, and in Ethiopia, services for the very poor are a centerpiece of the Pentecostal agenda (see Miller and Yamamori 2007). In Kenya, Pentecostals have long been engaged in providing social services for women and children (Seeley 1987).

At the same time, this payoff structure supports the possibility of exploitative relationships between Pentecostal patrons and their clients. Since pastors receive resources from congregants themselves and then repay those clients with a combination of (fewer) resources and some spiritual rewards, a Pentecostal form of big man rule can exacerbate the exploitation of common citizens in patron-client relationships, at least in financial terms. Instances of

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22   For this insight, I am indebted to Dr Umar Danfulani of the University of Jos, Nigeria.

"false prophets" motivated by personal enrichment thus pose a strong counter-point to the advances in social service provision.[23] An equilibrium of exchange emerges, but material payoffs still favor patrons over clients.

These features together help to explain why the new Pentecostal move-ment—and not the mainline Christian denominations, Islam, or other tradi-tions—has emerged as the principal alternative to traditional, ethnic-based big man rule. From an organizational standpoint, the absence of a supra-hierarchy in the new Pentecostal movement, and the internal competition among potential patrons that such a structure encourages, allows Pentecostal big men to tailor their messages to clients' needs and to challenge established patrons in ways that mainline Christian and Muslim leaders cannot. Mission churches and Muslim organizations have also long served as alternatives to the African state in service provision, but those relationships have been more akin to social contracts than patron-client ones. In charismatic Pentecostal churches, decentralized and personalized exchange without hierarchy allows big man rule to flourish. From a psychological perspective, the emphasis on prosperity, and what Marshall (1998) refers to as Pentecostalism's morally con-trolled materialism creates a resource-based foundation for the relationship between Pentecostal big men and their congregant clients that differs in degree if not in kind from mainline Christian and Muslim exchange networks. Furthermore, in a payoff structure that makes giving a reward and incorpo-rates miracles into the exchange, Pentecostal big men compensate loyalty not only with tangible resources, but also with the psychological benefits of prom-ised blessings. These expanded resources facilitate the patron-client relation-ship in ways that further distinguish Pentecostal big man rule from the informal modes of exchange in mainline Christian or Muslim networks.

What makes a mutually beneficial exchange of resources for loyalty possible in the context of charismatic Pentecostalism? An important aspect underpin-ning charismatic Pentecostal worship and exchange is the belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to provide. This much is clear in expressions of gratitude that Pentecostals offer not to the big man pastor but rather to God Almighty, even for practical resources and benefits in which the church as an organization clearly has a hand. God, then, may be taken as the ultimate provider of resources for loyalty. By virtue of belief in the gifts of Pentecostal pastors, con-gregants may extend the same commitment to their church leaders, granting them almost God-like status (Soothill 2007). Pentecostal leaders, for their part, draw theological inspiration from those gifts they wield—healing and proph-esy foremost among them. The charismatic leader, according to Weber, is set

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23   See the explanation in Gifford (2004:192–193).

apart from ordinary people and "endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers" (Weber 1978:241). In embracing their special duty to bring blessings of the Holy Spirit through those gifts, Pentecostal leaders are in position to provide many of the practical needs their congregants face, just as those congregants extend loyalty and devotion to their pastors. Thus, the instrumental exchange of resources for loyalty between patrons and clients in the Pentecostal context can be viewed as resting on a foundation of belief in the powers and miracles of the Holy Spirit.

Explaining Contemporary African Politics

Viewing charismatic Pentecostalism through the lens of patron-client relationships helps to explain several aspects of African politics. Most obvious from this chapter is its impact on informal political institutions: where states are weak, norms governing interpersonal interactions and exchanges emerge outside of formal government channels. In Africa, those norms have long followed ethnic and kinship lines and have created a class of political big men who draw resources from the state and distribute them to loyal clients from their ethnic groups. Hence the prominence of ethnicity in the study of African politics. Yet, for the reasons outlined above, we might now view the new Pentecostal movement as an alternative channel for patron-client relationships. This has two practical consequences for politics in the region. First, Pentecostal big man rule rearranges the channels through which patronage flows. As goods and loyalty move between members of charismatic Pentecostal churches and their respective elites, membership in those churches becomes doubly important, and pastors gain the prestige and loyalty previously reserved for high-ranking government officials or prominent traditional rulers. Similarly, Pentecostal big man rule has the consequence of altering the characteristics of political big men. Where the Christian identity is a salient one, incentives emerge both for religious elites to engage with the political process (to expand access to resources for distribution) and for other political elites to engage with Pentecostalism (to expand access to coveted loyalty). Thus, despite playing a largely informal role in Ghana and elsewhere, charismatic Pentecostalism has important implications for the manner in which limited resources are distributed and power is consolidated—both key elements to understanding politics.

Pentecostal big man rule also provides leverage for understanding the increasing role of Pentecostals in the formal political process in Africa. Notably, a number of recent presidents in sub-Saharan Africa—including Mills in Ghana, Obasanjo in Nigeria, and Chiluba in Zambia—have made their status

as born-again or charismatic Pentecostals a prominent characteristic of their rule. Pastors themselves have begun participation in electoral politics: Chris Okotie ran as opposition to the incumbent Obasanjo in Nigeria's 2003 election, while Pentecostal leader Enoch Adeboye explicitly endorsed the candidacies of Obasanjo and, more recently, current Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan.[24] Pentecostal groups have made equally notable contributions to the process of democratization in African politics: in Zimbabwe, charismatic Pentecostals maintained pressure on the Mugabe regime to open the political process following economic hardship;[25] in Kenya, pro-democracy Pentecostals served as an important opposition to former President Moi (Freston 2001:152); and the Christian Association of Nigeria resolved that Christians should be directly involved in the political process (Burgess 2012). Evidence suggests that the charismatic faithful now endorse a union between political power and Pentecostal worship. According to data gathered by Burgess, for example, fully 92 percent of surveyed Nigerians state that pastors should openly express their views regarding national politics (ibid:6).

The increased involvement of Pentecostals in the formal political process is in keeping with a new form of Pentecostal big man rule. As Freston (2001:294) notes, the implications of Pentecostalism on political ideology may be ambiguous and the formation of Pentescostal political parties a stretch, yet religious and political leaders still stand to gain from a union of politics and Pentecostalism. By engaging in "time-serving"—pastors appearing alongside political leaders in power, for example, or political candidates attending notable megachurches—potential big men from both realms compete for the largest coalition of clients possible. Those ties increase the pie of new resources, not just from Pentecostal benefactors and the hope of miracles, but now from the conventional source of patronage goods—the state. Since clients, for their part, are more likely to assign loyalty where the assurance of resource flows are strongest, both sides of the patron-client exchange stand to gain from some overlap between charismatic Pentecostalism and the formal political process in Africa.

Finally, Pentecostal big man rule helps to explain political contestation and conflict in religiously divided contexts. In Nigeria, political engagement from Pentecostals expanded in response to Nigerian membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986, and to attempts to extend Shari'a law in both 1989 and 1999 (Ojo 2006). More recently, as terrorist attacks against

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24   For an astute description of Pentecostal influences on Nigerian politics, see Burgess (2012). See also Burgess' contribution to this volume.

25   See Dorman (2002), Maxwell (2000).

churches have multiplied in the north of the country, charismatic Pentecostal leaders and church members have grown increasingly critical of Islam (Burgess 2012). In my own research, survey data suggests that charismatic Pentecostals and Muslims both tend to be more exclusive than other religionists in terms of membership expectations and social networks, increasing the grounds for misunderstanding, animosity, and competition between the two groups in political terms.[26]

These expressions of religious contestation can be viewed, in part, as a function of Pentecostal big man rule. Patrons in the charismatic Pentecostal movement face the tasks of accessing resources and of establishing broad legitimacy, as a means of signaling to potential clients their capacity to deliver those material resources. Particularly in states with divided religious populations, directly confronting Islam can generate leverage over the public sphere, and thus aid Pentecostal patrons, in these two endeavors. First, Pentecostal leaders might exploit or invoke Christian-Muslim tensions in order to appeal to wide audiences, thereby attracting mainline Christians, members of rival Pentecostal churches, and perhaps converts. Secondly, given the trends away from ethnic-based political patronage outlined above, Pentecostal patrons who control the public debate over Christian-Muslim differences may be better positioned to exploit new Pentecostal access to state resources. Of course, this aspect of Pentecostal big man rule might apply with special force only in contexts of religious polarization (such as Nigeria), and it does not take into account motivations for contestation from the Muslim side. It is nevertheless instructive to consider that the expansion of the charismatic Pentecostal movement in Africa has moved in lockstep with the expansion of political Islam in the region.

Conclusion

I have argued that the political impact of the charismatic Pentecostal movement in Africa can best be understood as a reorganization of the longstanding form of political distribution known as big man rule. In a context of shifting social values in African states, the combination of formal challenges to ethnic salience, continued weaknesses in state institutions, and urbanization has created both the need and the space for a new kind of patron-client exchange. Charismatic Pentecostalism fills the void with a payoff structure uniquely suited to the post-economic crisis needs of both patrons and clients.

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26   For more details, see McCauley (2013).

Thus, Ghanaian and other African Pentecostals continue to rely on the informal institution of patron-client relationships to fulfill their expectations of direct material resources and personal allegiance. In place of traditional, kinship ties that bind patrons to clients, however, that bond is increasingly established through belief in the power of the Holy Spirit. For both organizational and psychological reasons, I have argued that the new Pentecostal movement serves as a better alternative to traditional big man rule than do the more established religious traditions in Africa.

The implications of this research are both theoretical and practical. From a theoretical perspective, the argument differs from literature suggesting a Weberian, Protestant work ethic as the explanation for charismatic Pentecostalism's success in Africa, though the proposed alternative is not simply one of occult economies of ritual sacrifice and messianic spirituality. Instead, resources and loyalty are exchanged with mutually beneficial intentions that allow both patrons and clients to delve into the spiritual while preserving the practical. Weberian as well as occult descriptions certainly find relevance to some networks within the wide variety of charismatic Pentecostal churches in Africa, yet the trends suggest a closer link to the informal political institution of big man rule than has previously been acknowledged. From a broader, practical perspective, the study highlights an ongoing shift away from the power of traditional leaders in Africa, and it introduces a new kind of informal political player—Pentecostal patrons—that may reshape the manner in which African politics is both studied and conducted. It also helps to explain why, though not inherently exploitative, the new Pentecostal movement faces important challenges from potentially deceptive or corrupt leaders with incentives to self-aggrandize or to offer impossible-to-meet promises.

The application of big man rule in the conventional, political sense to new Pentecostal networks is not without limitation. Foremost is the fact that, as noted above, resources for patronage in a Pentecostal context are not typically derived from the state. While that distinction undermines the relationship between conventional big man rule and Pentecostalism, the new patron-client relations of Christian revivalist movements still constitute a useful means for understanding how informal institutions are used to fill voids left by the state. Big man rule may apply best, nevertheless, to the new, charismatic Pentecostal churches rather than to the classical or denominational ones, and to those charismatic churches that prioritize the gifts of prosperity and material wellbeing over those focusing on deliverance and healing.

Furthermore, the potential for new Pentecostalism as an alternative to traditional big man rule can obviously extend only as far as its new converts allow. One cannot expect non-Pentecostals to engage in this particular form of

patron-client exchange, so the scope of the argument is limited to members and potential members of the Pentecostal community. In that sense, this study suggests a complement to, rather than a complete substitute for, traditional big man rule. Nevertheless, as mainline Christian denominations and even some Muslim organizations begin to adopt elements of charismatic religious worship to keep pace with the expansion of the new Pentecostal movement,[27] religious forms of big man rule may become an increasingly common phenomenon in Africa. Finally, I have described Pentecostal big man rule as an informal institution of exchange that accounts for its otherwise limited formal political role. As political leaders of Pentecostal faith increasingly assert a union between their religion and politics, however, and as Pentecostal churches begin to formalize and publicize their positions on policy issues, a more formal political role for Pentecostalism may soon emerge.

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■ Please check the unpaired quotation marks in the sentence 'and Brazil'.

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27   On changes within Islam in the region, see Olufunke Adeboye, (2004:154); on changes within mainline Christian churches, see Gifford (2004).

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