AFRICA'S NEW BIG MAN RULE? PENTECOSTALISM AND PATRONAGE IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The concept of 'big man rule', conventionally invoked to refer to a kinship-based relationship between patron and client, is now finding application in the charismatic Pentecostal movement in Africa. This article explores why new Pentecostalism emerges as an alternative to traditional clientelism, and how well the analogy of big man rule applies. It traces the Pentecostal form of big man rule to four socio-economic transformations: ongoing weakness in the state's ability to provide social welfare; a change in social values in the wake of the global financial crisis; expanding state control over customary activities; and urbanization. Drawing on data collected from both patrons and clients in Ghana, the article shows that Pentecostalism mirrors traditional big man rule by encouraging members to break from their past, to trust leadership, and to commit exclusively to their religious social network. Among church leaders, Pentecostalism also encourages internal competition and the provision of social services. Most importantly, the movement creates pay-off structures that replicate the exchange of resources for loyalty central to big man rule. The implication is that Pentecostalism's success as an alternative informal institution is not a function of Weberian ethics or occult spiritualities, but rather its ability to fill voids left by the state and to provide new social networks.

SINCE MARSHALL SAHLINS' SEMINAL TYPOLOGY of local leadership in Melanesia,[1] the concept of the 'big man' has featured prominently in descriptions of politics in the developing world. This is particularly true of scholarship on sub-Saharan Africa, where the combination of pre-colonial norms, post-colonial institutions, and weak states created

1. Marshall Sahlins, 'Poor man, rich man, big man, chief: political types in Melanesia and Polynesia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1963), pp. 285–303.

opportunities for personal rulers to gain and maintain power by virtue of informal relationships with local masses.[2] The typical underpinning of big man rule in Africa has been the kinship ties that bind leaders to their followers and serve as a heuristic cue for both sides in the intricate exchange of resources for loyalty.

Recently, the concept of big man rule in Africa has found application outside of the standard channels of ethnicity and kinship in the most powerful social movement to touch the continent over the last generation, charismatic Pentecostalism.[3] Alternatively referred to as charismatic Pentecostalism, new or neo-Pentecostalism, or sometimes born-again Pentecostalism, the movement is characterized by a focus on the Holy Spirit and on material well-being. Its spread began in the late 1970s, as new churches and leaders distinguished themselves from the classic, mission-based Pentecostal churches. Paul Gifford has noted in this movement a shift away from popular participation and toward a model of 'unchallengeable big men'.[4] David Maxwell applies the concept of the big man to the leadership structure of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) revivalist movement.[5] Ruth Marshall describes the new forms of prestige that have made leaders of the born-again Pentecostal churches in Nigeria analogous to political big men,[6] and Ogbu Kalu writes of the 'big man of the big God'.[7] 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.

This article seeks to clarify the relationship between big man rule, as typically understood in political studies of Africa, and the charismatic Pentecostal movement. Are Pentecostal leaders and wealthy church benefactors the new big men in Africa? If so, what explains the shift in social norms away from a kinship-based distribution of resources and loyalty and toward a Pentecostal, church-based format? To whom might an

2.   Goran Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006); Robert H. Jackson and Carl Rosberg, 'Personal rule: theory and practice in Africa', *Comparative Politics* **16**, 4 (1984), pp. 421–42; René Lemarchand, 'Political clientelism and ethnicity in tropical Africa: competing solidarities in nation-building', *American Political Science Review* **66**, 1 (1972), pp. 68–90.
3.   Gifford calls new Pentecostalism the most significant ideological reformation on the continent. See Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a globalising African economy* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2004).
4.   *Ibid.*, p. 188.
5.   David Maxwell, 'Delivered from the spirit of poverty? Pentecostalism, prosperity, and modernity in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Religion in Africa* **28**, 3 (1998), pp. 350–73.
6.   Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, IL, 2009), pp. 105–7.
7.   Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An introduction* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008).

alternative formulation of big man rule apply? Building on a framework of informal institutions, patron–client relations, and the burgeoning literature on Pentecostalism in Africa, I construct an argument that explains the link between big man rule and the charismatic Pentecostal movement in Africa. My analysis is based on evidence collected during two years of field research, including interviews with over 40 Pentecostal leaders and 500 congregants of various denominations.

The article begins with a review of the notion of big man rule, as it applies to the political distribution of resources and loyalty in Africa. Focusing on the role of informal institutions and the importance of ethnic ties in patron–client relations, I characterize regional 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 an opportunity 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. More specifically, I show that by promoting internal competition, materialism as a blessing, and a complete break from one's past, the movement creates pay-off structures that allow Pentecostal big men to distribute goods and resources in exchange for loyal support from their congregations of followers.

The application of big man rule to new Pentecostalism is not without its limitations, however. The opportunity to supplant traditional patron–client ties with Pentecostal ones applies only to the movement's adherents, of course, and the contexts in which the argument can be generalized may be limited to those in which Pentecostalism is prominent yet politically informal. Most importantly, the analogy of big man rule to new Pentecostalism is threatened by the provenance of resources distributed from patrons to clients, since traditional big men rely on access to the state, which is not typically, or at least not yet, a feature of Pentecostal leadership. Despite these and other challenges, the presence of new opportunities for informal, mutually beneficial exchange between Pentecostal patrons and their congregant clients suggests that

the Pentecostal movement is indeed emerging as a new form of big man rule in Africa.

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, 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.[8] 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 allegiance.[9] That relationship ensures that clients have their welfare needs met directly, and that big men enjoy the authority and legitimacy necessary to maintain power.

Informal patronage exchanges constitute a centrepiece 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.[10] 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 often 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.[11] 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

8.   For example, David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi characterize the current Rwandan regime as a patrimonial, big man state: 'Developmental patrimonialism? The case of Rwanda', *African Affairs* **111**, 444 (2012), pp. 379–403.
9.   Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*.
10.   On the 'ordinariness' of elite patrons dating to pre-colonial times, see Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: The politics of the belly* (Longman, London, 1993); Bruce J. Berman describes a system of elite patronage that existed prior to colonialism and then generated alliances between traditional and colonial leaders: 'Ethnicity, patronage, and the African state: the politics of uncivil nationalism', *African Affairs* **97**, 388 (1998), pp. 305–41.
11.   Pierre Englebert describes the exogenous imposition of political borders: *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2000). For an explanation of extractive colonial institutions, see Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson, 'The colonial origins of comparative development: an empirical investigation', *The American Economic Review* **91**, 5 (2001), pp. 1369–1401. On the post-colonial formation of personal rulers, see Robert H. Jackson and Carl Rosberg, 'Personal rule'.

'prebendal' fashion.[12] Common to explanations of the ongoing relevance of patronage in Africa is a weak post-colonial state unable to fulfil 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.[13] 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.[14] In the context of weak states and a heavy reliance on social norms and informal institutions, one's lineage is viewed as the key 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, in so far as the social norms governing the acquisition of both authority and welfare frequently demand respect for deceased ancestors, it behoves both patrons and clients to engage in reciprocal relations with counterparts of the same ancestral lines, however broadly defined.[15]

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

12. Peter Ekeh, 'Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: a theoretical statement', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, 1 (1975), pp. 91–112; Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The rise and fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987).
13. Michael Gilsenan, 'Against patron–client relations' in Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (eds), *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (Duckworth Press, London, 1977), pp. 167–83, describes these features succinctly. See also Jean-Pascal Daloz, '"Big men" in sub-Saharan Africa: how elites accumulate positions and resources', *Comparative Sociology* 2, 1 (2003), pp. 271–84.
14. Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*; Lemarchand, 'Political clientelism and ethnicity in tropical Africa'.
15. See Richard Dowden, *Africa: Altered states, ordinary miracles* (Public Affairs, New York, 2009), p. 318.

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.[16] 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.[17] 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 ex-
change 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.[18] 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 (such as
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.[19] 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.

The emergence of a new form of big man rule

Big man rule has persisted as a key informal institution in Africa at least
since 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,[20] this section explores four recent trends that create space for an

16.   For a description of patrimonial draws on state resources, see Daloz, '"Big men" in
sub-Saharan Africa'.
17.   Rod Alence, 'Political institutions and developmental governance in sub-Saharan
Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies* **42**, 2 (2004), pp. 163–87.
18.   See Lemarchand, 'Political clientelism and ethnicity in tropical Africa'.
19.   Daloz, '"Big men" in sub-Saharan Africa'.
20.   Daniel N. Posner and Daniel J. Young, 'The institutionalization of political power in
Africa', *Journal of Democracy* **18**, 3 (2007), pp. 126–40. See also Staffan Lindberg, *Democracy
and Elections in Africa* (Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, MD, 2007).

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.[21] Social norms can be defined broadly as the unwritten rules that regulate social behaviour by prescribing or discouraging various interpersonal actions.[22] 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;[23] corrupt exchange is viewed differently in Botswana and in Somalia;[24] and matrilineality commonly defines ethnic membership among the Yao but not the Tumbuka in Malawi.[25] 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.[26]

As Ruth Marshall notes, the West African economic crisis of the late 1970s had exactly this kind of effect.[27] In Ghana, for example, average income tumbled by 1980 to 20 percent below its 1950 level.[28] The economic recovery programme (ERP) of the early 1980s corrected macroeconomic imbalances, but the short-term consequences for individuals included declining returns on agricultural investment, higher prices for imported goods, and a reduction in civil service employment

21. Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, 'Informal institutions and comparative politics: a research agenda', *Perspectives on Politics* 2, 4 (2004), pp. 725–40.
22. This paragraph relies heavily on Helmke and Levitsky, 'Informal institutions and comparative politics' and Michael Hechter and Karl-Dieter Opp (eds), *Social Norms* (Russell Sage Press, New York, NY, 2001). These works are recommended for an in-depth understanding of informal institutions and social norms.
23. According to evidence from the Afrobarometer public opinion surveys, Round 4, Question 16. See <http://www.afrobarometer.org/survey-and-methods/questionaires> (21 June, 2012).
24. See *Global Post*, 'Africa news: Botswana is the least corrupt African country', 1 December, 2011. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/africa-emerges/africa-news-botswana-least-corrupt-african-country> (29 November 2012).
25. Mike Mtika and Henry Doctor, 'Matriliny, patriliny, and wealth flow variation in rural Malawi', *African Sociological Review* **6**, 2 (2002), pp. 71–97.
26. The capacity of norms to change is explained by Helmke and Levitsky, 'Informational institutions and comparative politics'; on the tendency to turn toward religion, see Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, 'Religion and politics in sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies* **36**, 2 (1998), pp. 175–201.
27. Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*.
28. See, for a description of the economic crisis in Ghana, Robin Alpine and James Pickett, *Agriculture, Liberalization, and Economic Growth in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, 1960–1990* (OECD, Paris, 1993).

opportunities. These shocks to livelihood, coupled with disgust over
rampant corruption, contributed to a revaluation of values and a religious
awakening.[29] Some of the new religious energy focused on holiness teach-
ing, but many new Pentecostals began to prioritize harmonious living as a
response to crisis.[30] In this manner, new values and a new form of
Christian worship emerged, which drew on its transnational ties to
American evangelism but ultimately expressed an independent African
desire for well-being and security.[31]

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.[32] More recently, however, land control has become the
subject of highly visible chieftaincy–state collaborations and formaliza-
tion.[33] 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.[34] Ato Onoma
notes, furthermore, that states exhibit increasing interest in controlling
land tenure where lands provide direct economic value.[35] State regula-
tions are also beginning to trump customary norms governing family and
health matters, such as divorce, marriage, and circumcision.[36] The conse-
quence is an undermining of the practical role that ethnic ties have served.
Finally, party platforms are increasingly meaningful in African elections,
particularly in Ghana,[37] suggesting an attenuation of the need for patrons
and clients to rely strictly on ethnic channels in the context of

29.   Ellis and ter Haar, 'Religion and politics in sub-Saharan Africa'; Paul Gifford, 'Some
recent developments in African Christianity', *African Affairs* **93**, 373 (1994), pp. 513–34;
Kate Meagher, 'Trading on faith: religious movements and informal economic governance
in Nigeria', *Journal of Modern African Studies* **47**, 3 (2009), pp. 397–423.
30.   Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*.
31.   Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*.
32.   Robert H. Bates, 'Modernization, ethnic competition, and the rationality of politics in
contemporary Africa' in D. Rothchild and V. Olorunsola (eds), *State Versus Ethnic Claims:
African policy dilemmas* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1983), pp. 152–71.
33.   Catherine Boone, 'Property and constitutional order: land tenure reform and the
future of the African state', *African Affairs* **106**, 425 (2007), pp. 557–86; Paul Jackson,
'Reshuffling an old deck of cards? The politics of local government reform in Sierra Leone',
African Affairs **106**, 422 (2007), pp. 95–111; Lorenzo Cotula (ed.), *Changes in 'Customary'
Land Tenure Systems in Africa* (International Institute for Environment and Development,
Stevenage, 2007).
34.   Janine M. Ubink, *In the Land of the Chiefs: Customary law, land conflicts, and the role of
the state in peri-urban Ghana* (Leiden University Press, Leiden, 2008).
35.   Ato Kwamena Onoma, *The Politics of Property Rights Institutions in Africa* (Cambridge
University Press, Cambridge, 2009).
36.   Jeanne M. Toungara, 'Inventing the African family: gender and family law reform in
Côte d'Ivoire', *Journal of Social History* **28**, 1 (1994), pp. 37–61.
37.   Lindsay Whitfield, '"Change for a Better Ghana": party competition, institutionaliza-
tion and alternation in Ghana's 2008 elections', *African Affairs* **108**, 433 (2009), pp. 621–41.

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.[38] Over 40 percent of Ghanaian residents lack access to electricity, and nearly one-fifth of children under five years old are 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.[39] 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 fill the void adequately.

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.[40] That trend is expected to continue, making urbanization rates likely 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 50 percent of the population, at an annual rate of change of 3.4 percent.[41] 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

38. Data in this paragraph draw on the World Development Indicators, 'Data: Indicators' (World Bank, Washington, 2012).
39. Pierre Englebert, *Africa: Unity, sovereignty, sorrow* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2009); Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2000).
40. See Christine Kessides, 'The urban transition in sub-Saharan Africa: implications for economic growth and poverty reduction' (Working Paper No. 97, World Bank Transport and Urban Development Department, 2005).
41. CIA World Factbook, 'Africa: Ghana' (Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, 2012).

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,[42] urbanization undermines the traditional conception of big man rule and creates both the opportunity and the need for an alternative.

Data from interviewees in Ghana (described in greater detail below) are consistent with this argument: among urban residents of Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, only 6 percent reported having appealed to a traditional (ethnic) leader for help in the past year, whereas 37 percent of respondents from surrounding rural villages had done 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 mirrors – and perhaps now replaces for some Africans – the longstanding kinship-based network.

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.[43] 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 the opportunity for an alternative form of big man rule linked to the charismatic Pentecostal movement there.[44]

42.   Kessides, 'The urban transition in sub-Saharan Africa'.
43.   Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The political basis of agricultural policies* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1981).
44.   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. See Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, p. 219.

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 those of traditional ethnic-based patronage networks.

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 revival in South Africa.[45] In addition, wealthy benefactors within the church can fulfil 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, so opportunities can emerge for female patrons within the Christian revivalist movement, especially in providing access to spiritual powers to the female contingent of congregants.[46]

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.[47] According to Kate

45. On Ghana, see Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*; on Nigeria, see Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*; on Zimbabwe, see Maxwell, 'Delivered from the spirit of poverty?'; and on South Africa, see Allan Anderson, 'New African initiated pentecostals and charismatics in South Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa* **35** (2005), pp. 66–92.
46. See Jane E. Soothill, *Gender, Social Change, and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Brill, Boston, 2007).
47. Ben Jones, 'Colonialism and civil war: religion and violence in East Africa' in A. R. Murphy (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (Blackwell, London, 2011); Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*; Ruth Marshall, 'Power in the name of Jesus', *Review of African Political Economy* **52** (1991), pp. 21–37; Birgit Meyer, 'The power of money: politics, occult forces, and pentecostalism in Ghana', *African Studies Review* **41**, 3 (1998), pp. 15–37.

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.[48]

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.[49] 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 fulfil that role: wealthier members are encouraged to offer employment to fellow congregants; prayer groups double as financial advisers and child minders; and congregants perform regular house visits to fellow members in need.

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.[50] 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.[51] Student involvement is also a centrepiece of the new Pentecostal movement: many churches began as student meeting groups, expanding to classrooms and building other facilities 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

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48.   Meagher, 'Trading on faith'.
49.   Marshall, 'Power in the name of Jesus'.
50.   On the genesis and perceptions of urban Pentecostalism, see Ben Jones, 'The church in the village, the village in the church: pentecostalism in Teso, Uganda', *Cahiers d'etudes Africaines* **178** (2005), pp. 497–517; and Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, p. 101.
51.   Maxwell, 'Delivered from the spirit of poverty?'.

students away from home.[52] 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.[53] Kumasi's Harvest Chapel International, for instance, has split multiple times as new church leaders with somewhat distinct visions establish followings.[54] In the absence of a movement-wide hierarchy, and often with little apprenticeship expected of pastors,[55] aspiring preachers of this sort can compete for the loyalty and allegiance of clients even as the vertical distance within Pentecostal churches remains significant. In similar fashion to conventional big man rule, however, when the reign of a Pentecostal big man ends, the foundation of direct exchange between patron and client dissolves, contributing to the phenomenon of 'church hopping' within a context of otherwise committed patron–client relationships.[56]

Perhaps most critically, the charismatic Pentecostal movement offers a pay-off 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.[57] 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 marshalled and distributed in exchange for loyalty. For their part, wealthy benefactors in charismatic

52.   Interview, Rev. Roland Owusu-Ansah, Associate Pastor, Harvest Chapel International, Kumasi, 8 April 2011.
53.   Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, p. 5.
54.   Interview, Rev. Roland Owusu-Ansah.
55.   See Meyer, 'The power of money'.
56.   For this insight, I am indebted to Dr Umar Danfulani of the University of Jos, Nigeria.
57.   Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, p. 105.

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 pay-off structure of Pentecostal patronage has fuelled 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.[58] 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 centrepiece of the Pentecostal agenda.[59] In Kenya, Pentecostals have long been engaged in providing social services for women and children.[60]

At the same time, the pay-off 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 'false prophets' motivated by personal enrichment thus pose a strong counterpoint to the advances in social service provision.[61] An equilibrium of exchange emerges, but material pay-offs still favour patrons over clients.

These features together help to explain why the new Pentecostal movement – and not the mainline Christian denominations, Islam, or other traditions – 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 that 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

58.   See Matthews Ojo, 'Nigerian Pentecostalism and transnational religious networks in West African coastal regions', in Laurent Fouchard, André Mary and René Otayek (eds), *Enterprises religieuses transnationales en Afrique de l'Ouest* (Karthala, Paris, 2005), pp. 395–415.
59.   See Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The new face of Christian social engagement* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2007).
60.   Janet Seeley, 'Social welfare in a Kenyan town: policy and practice, 1902–1985', *African Affairs* **86**, 345 (1987), pp. 541–66.
61.   See the explanation in Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, pp. 192–3.

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 refers to as Pentecostalism's 'morally controlled materialism',[62] 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 pay-off structure that makes giving a reward and incorporates miracles into the exchange, Pentecostal big men compensate loyalty not only with tangible resources, but also with the psychological benefits of promised blessings. These expanded resources facilitate the patron–client relationship in ways that further distinguish Pentecostal big man rule from the informal modes of exchange in mainline Christian or Muslim networks.

Ghana: a case of Pentecostal big man rule

The case of Ghana offers important insight into the status of new Pentecostals as patrons and clients in a system of big man rule. As Allan Anderson notes, Ghana has emerged, along with Nigeria, as one of the centres of new Pentecostalism on the continent: over a quarter of all Ghanaians now self-identify with charismatic and Pentecostal churches,[63] and recently deceased President John Atta Mills, himself a charismatic Pentecostal, was outspoken in his desire to see the prominence of the movement spread still further.[64] Furthermore, despite Ghana's current status as one of the most stable and prosperous states in Africa, informal institutions continue to have a central role in the everyday lives of most Ghanaians.[65] Churches and religious groups thus fulfil a variety of duties beyond worship and liturgy, and while the socio-political influence of new Pentecostalism remains informal, the movement's big men enjoy profound esteem and influence at local levels.

Research for this study was conducted primarily in Kumasi and its surrounding satellite villages.[66] Studies of megachurches and superstar

62. Ruth Marshall, 'Mediating the global and local in Nigerian Pentecostalism', *Journal of Religion in Africa* **28,** 3 (1998), p. 282.
63. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*; Pew (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004), 'Moved by the spirit'.
64. 'I wish Ghana were a prayer camp, Mills', *MyJoyOnline* [Ghana], 14 September 2011. <http://edition.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/200903/27464.php> (13 September 2012).
65. Lauren M. MacLean, *Informal Institutions and Citizenship in Rural Africa: Risk and reciprocity in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010).
66. Kumasi, the geographic centre of the Ashanti kingdom, is religiously and ethnically mixed, though Christians and Ashanti predominate.

pastors located in Ghana's capital Accra abound,[67] yet the broadest impact of new Pentecostalism still occurs in town settings, among the up-wardly mobile and those seeking answers to quotidian needs, and at the juncture of rural–urban migration. I thus sought to locate the empirical re-search in an urban setting with the feel of a town rather than an expansive, modern city, and in a place that would provide easy access to surrounding rural communities and university students. In Kumasi, congregants also have ample choice between small, neighbourhood churches and large churches with prominent leaders, yet the opportunity for direct relation-ships between potential patrons and clients is in almost all cases available. The empirical data include interviews with over three dozen Pentecostal leaders and prominent church members, meetings with local political figures and leaders of mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim groups, attendance at Pentecostal services, and survey data (summarized below).

Spirit-based and classical Pentecostal churches appeared in Ghana in the early part of the twentieth century.[68] New Pentecostalism as a move-ment, by contrast, began with Nicholas Duncan-Williams's Action Faith Chapel in 1979. Aimed primarily at university students and upwardly mobile youth, Duncan-Williams described his church in terms neatly in accordance with the concept of big man rule: it was, he stated, a place for people who had 'nowhere else to go'.[69] With tacit support from President John Jerry Rawlings, who endured pressure from the mainline and Catholic churches over human rights abuses, new charismatic Pentecostal churches expanded rapidly after the late 1970s.[70] Student groups continue to constitute a key network through which new Pentecostal churches emerge and grow in Ghana, and the migratory link between urban-oriented youth and their natal villages has driven the movement beyond cities.[71] As for the potential big men in these burgeoning patron–client relationships, pastors in Ghana's new Pentecostal movement typically express their status in terms of possessing one or more of the spiritual 'gifts': healing, proph-ecy, or deliverance. Prosperity and material well-being remain a central concern for both preachers and their congregants in Ghana.

Above, I noted that the conditions creating space for a new form of big man rule in Africa persist in Ghana: a financial crisis evoked a desire for

67. S. K. Bonsu and R. W. Belk, 'Marketing a new African God: Pentecostalism and material salvation in Ghana', *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* **15**, 4 (2010), pp. 305–23; Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity;* Rosalind Hackett, 'Charismatic/Pentecostal appropriation of media technologies in Nigeria and Ghana', *Journal of Religion in Africa* **28**, 3 (1998), pp. 258–77.
68. See Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism,* Chapter 6, for a summary.
69. J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current developments within independent in-digenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Brill, Leiden, 2004), p. 113.
70. Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, p. 34.
71. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*.

new social values; the state expanded its domain over once customary norms yet remained weak in its provision of social services; and urbanization has separated young, upwardly mobile Ghanaians from their traditional networks of support. The story of Bishop F. K. Akwaboah and the Christian Faith Ministries highlights how a potential big man can exploit that space in ways beneficial both to his ministry and his clients. Bishop Akwaboah established his first church in the northern section of Kumasi on land long neglected by the state, as well as developers and other churches, because it was perceived as a hotbed of witchcraft.[72] Blessed with the self-proclaimed gift of deliverance, Bishop Akwaboah attracted a mixed clientele of worshippers with acute, short-term problems; those with mental illnesses, often brought to the church by their families; and the poor and upwardly mobile looking for freedom from their lot in life. His early services in the 1980s took place in an open field, with evening meetings illuminated by the headlights of his old Toyota.[73] Currently, Christian Faith Ministries is completing construction of a 5,000-seat, open-air auditorium, and several branches have opened overseas, including in Germany and the United States.

In keeping with the reinvention of big man rule, Bishop Akwaboah and his congregation have implicitly cooperated in constructing complex but obvious patron–client ties. First, members are convinced to break from their pasts and to commit to the church: the 'treatment' process in preparation for deliverance serves to undermine kinship ties, and some congregants are even given the opportunity to stay in lodgings on the church compound. Furthermore, Bishop Akwaboah had to overcome competition from other Christian and Pentecostal leaders in his locality, which he did by exploiting the undesirable land. In terms of the patron–client exchange, Christian Faith Ministries provides congregants with several livelihood benefits: the promise of healing through the week-long deliverance process, the opportunity to give and be blessed in multiple rounds of monetary collections and tithing, and practical social welfare programmes like HIV/AIDS outreach, cocoa farming on the church compound, and education for children. In exchange, Bishop Akwaboah enjoys immense popularity and allegiance that has allowed him to continue expanding his ministry, despite the modest means of the average client.

Evidence from interviews with other church leaders in Kumasi supports the description of Pentecostal leaders as informal socio-political big men. The big man, it should be recalled, enjoys particularly high status and often engages in ostentatious displays of wealth; doing so perpetuates the

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72. Interview, Bishop Dr F. K. Akwaboah, Christian Faith Ministries, Kumasi, 13 April 2011.
73. *Ibid.*

patron–client relationship by encouraging in followers a perception of his limitless access to resources. As the pastor of one charismatic Pentecostal church in Kumasi asked rhetorically, 'How can I be taken seriously if it is not obvious that I myself have been blessed?'[74] Furthermore, in keeping with the challenge of competition that big men routinely face, the lead pastor in one of Kumasi's largest churches stated: 'The church is nothing without strong membership … a shepherd must keep his flock to succeed.'[75] Finally, the matter of succession is critical to Pentecostal churches, just as it is to traditional patron–client networks, since the direct exchange between patrons and clients is threatened. Rev. Emmanuel Ansah, past General Secretary of the National Association of Christian and Charismatic Churches in Ghana, argues that 'in order for charismatic Pentecostal churches to survive beyond the lifetimes of their founders, the very difficult task of legitimizing successors must be undertaken'.[76] The same could be said for conventional big man rule in African politics.

For a client perspective of the Pentecostal form of big man rule, I turn to results from a survey conducted in Kumasi in the spring of 2011. Respondents were recruited via a clustered, multi-stage, randomized sampling procedure with stratification by age and gender. Clusters included neighbourhoods in Kumasi and five surrounding satellite villages. The sample includes a total of 576 participants, 212 of whom self-identify as adherents of charismatic Pentecostalism. According to the logic of patron–client relations, clients should demonstrate greater trust in the leader, *vis-à-vis* individuals not engaged in big man rule.[77] They should also show evidence of breaking from their past and engaging exclusively with the network. Finally, clients in a big man relationship should express greater commitment to that particular social network, in order to demonstrate loyalty and allegiance to the patron.

For comparison, I distinguish between the attitudes and behaviours of charismatic Pentecostals and those of mainline Christian and Muslim faiths; as Table 1 indicates, charismatic Pentecostal respondents differ notably across all three dimensions. In terms of trust in leadership, respondents were asked how likely it is (on a 5-point Likert scale) that their religious leader would intervene personally to help them with a problem.[78] Of charismatic respondents, 83 percent – compared to just 46

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74. Interview, associate Pentecostal pastor, Kumasi, 5 May 2011.
75. Interview, head Pentecostal pastor, Kumasi, 17 May 2011.
76. Interview, Rev. Emmanuel Ansah, Associate Pastor, Covenant Family Community Church, Accra, 22 April 2011.
77. This is a central tenet of the argument made by Michael Bratton, 'Formal versus informal institutions in Africa', *Journal of Democracy* **18**, 3 (2007), pp. 96–110.
78. Response options were: 1 = Not at all likely, nearly unheard of; 2 = Unlikely; 3 = Possible, but it depends; 4 = Fairly likely, a good chance; 5 = Extremely likely, nearly a certainty.

Table 1. Comparison of attitudes and behaviours among Kumasi residents

	Charismatic Pentecostals	Mainline Christians	Muslims
Percent who believe church leader will personally help with problem	83	46	67
Percent listing more than half of friends from same church group	77	51	71
Percent listing religious identity as 'most important'	51	29	38
Percent who attend religious services more than once per week	49	25	21
Percent claiming to give more than 5 cedis per week to Church	70	58	47
N (Number of observations)	212	245	119

Notes: The charismatic Pentecostal categorical variable is statistically significant at the 95-percent confidence level in OLS analyses for all five measures, against an omitted category of pooled non-Pentecostals. Control variables included age, gender, education, ethnic identity, birthplace, and sector of employment (subsistence, informal, student, formal). Regression results available upon request. The mainline Christian category includes Protestants such as Methodists and Presbyterians, classical Pentecostals, and Catholics. Sample excludes 32 respondents who listed religious identity as Other or None.

percent of other Christians and 67 percent of Muslims – stated that their religious leader is somewhat or very likely to do so. To capture the break from the past that is critical for new patron–client relationships, respondents were asked what proportion of their friends are members of their own religious community. Higher proportions would indicate exclusivity in social attachments and a severing of ties to other social identity groups, and again, charismatic Pentecostals outstrip their counterparts in this regard: 77 percent of charismatic Pentecostals note that over one-half of their friends are of their own religious group, significantly more than mainline Christians (51 percent) and slightly more than Muslims (71 percent). Finally, three questions address commitment to the (religious) social network: (1) which personal identity – ethnicity, religion, nationality, occupation, gender, or other – is most important to the respondent; (2) how often the respondent attends religious services; and (3) whether or not the respondent contributes more than five Ghana cedis (approximately €2.25 or US$2.75) weekly to their religious institution. As rows 3–5 indicate, new Pentecostals express greater commitment to their religious network, by all three measures, than others in the sample. If these survey measures of trust in leadership, exclusivity, and commitment can be taken as evidence of a patron–client foundation, the findings suggest that charismatic Pentecostalism replicates the

informal norms of big man rule, both in absolute terms and relative to its mainline Christian and Muslim counterparts.[79]

Conclusion: the new big men in Africa?

I have argued that, 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 big man rule. Charismatic Pentecostalism fills the void with a pay-off structure uniquely suited to the post-economic crisis needs of both patrons and clients. Thus, Ghanaian and other Pentecostal Africans continue to rely on the informal institution of patron–client relationships to fulfil 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,[80] though the proposed alternative is not simply one of occult economies of ritual sacrifice and messianic spirituality.[81] 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 are relevant in some networks within the wide variety of charismatic Pentecostal churches in Africa, yet the trends suggest a closer link to the informal institution of big man rule than has been acknowledged previously. 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 the

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79.   Respondents may have wished to be perceived in a positive light (despite confidentiality). There is no strong reason to suspect, however, that socially desirable responses are a problem only among charismatic Pentecostals, and even if they are, that may reveal important information about the expectations to which charismatic Pentecostals are held.
80.   See Meagher, 'Trading on faith'.
81.   See, for example, Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, 'Occult economies and the violence of abstraction: notes from the South African postcolony', *American Ethnologist* **26**, 2 (1999), pp. 279–303.

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, however, 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,[82] 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,[83] a more formal political role for Pentecostalism may soon emerge.

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82. On changes within Islam in the region, see Olufunke Adeboye, 'Pentecostal challenges in Africa and Latin America: a comparative focus on Nigeria and Brazil', *Afrika Zamani* 11 and 12, (2004), pp. 136–159; on changes within mainline Christian churches, see Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*.

83. Examples of political activity by Pentecostals are found in Richard Burgess, 'Nigerian Pentecostals and political culture: a movement in transition', paper presented at the NPCRC Conference, Abuja (2012), and Sara Rich Dorman, 'Rocking the boat? Church-NGOs and democratization in Zimbabwe', *African Affairs* 101, 402 (2002), pp. 75–92.